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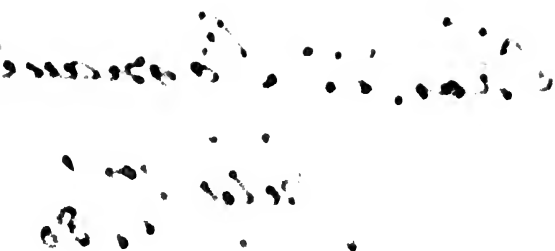
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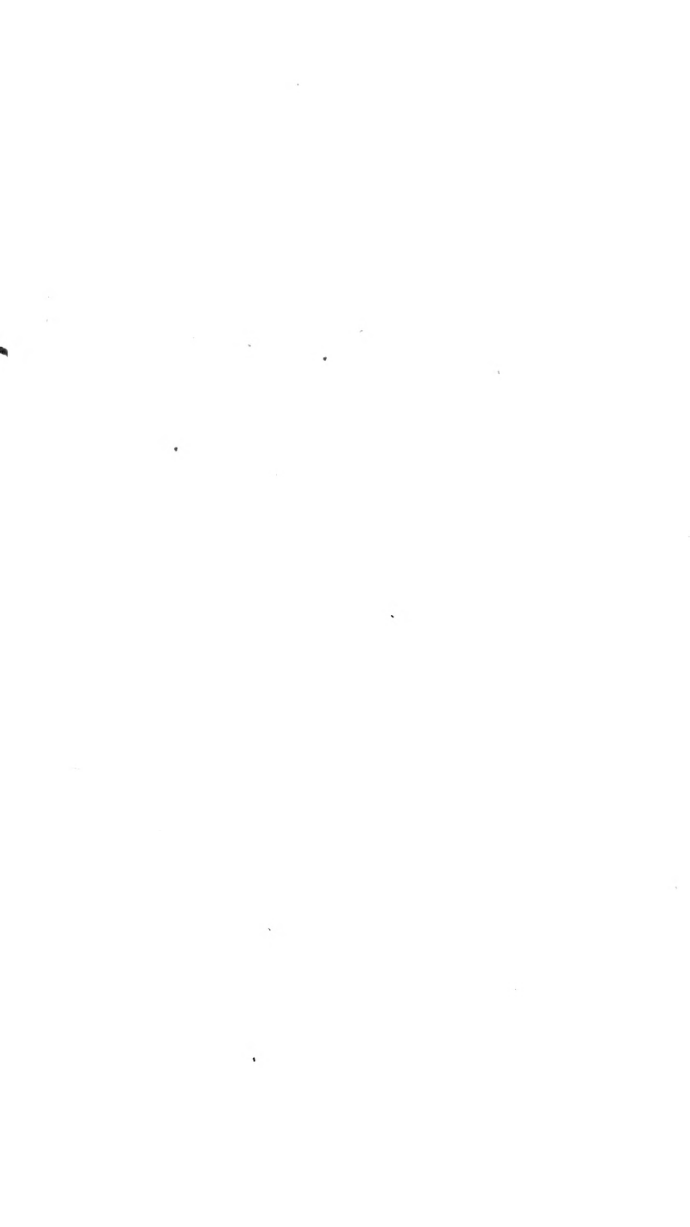
Chas. T. Lagnani
July 17/80

Goode

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THE
BETTER COVENANT

PRACTICALLY CONSIDERED.

FROM

HEBREWS VIII. 6. 10—12.

WITH

A SUPPLEMENT ON PHILIPPIANS II. 12, 13.

BY THE

REV. FRANCIS GOODE, M.A.

LECTURER OF CLAPHAM, AND LATE FELLOW OF TRINITY COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE.

WITH

A PREFACE AND TABLE OF CONTENTS

BY THE

REV. HERMAN HOOKER, M.A.

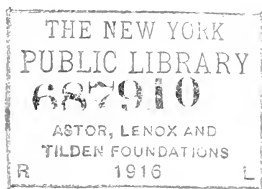
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P R E F A C E.

THE AUTHOR of this volume is understood to be one of the most devoted and useful of the clergy of the Church of England. He occupies a very important post as Lecturer of Clapham, a place known to many as the residence of Wilberforce, Thornton, and others, greatly distinguished for their piety and philanthropy. In the early part of his ministry, he officiated as Chaplain in the Mission Church at Calcutta. His services in this place were greatly useful, and he is still remembered there with great respect and affection. Archdeacon Corrie, now Bishop of Madras, and once the companion of Henry Martin,—in a letter to a friend in Philadelphia, dated Calcutta, Oct. 1834,—says, “ You will have seen Mr. Goode’s ‘ Lectures on the Better Covenant.’ They are much approved by good people at home, and are quite to my mind ; but some of our friends here do not enter fully into what appears to me the perfection of them, namely, the laying all on Christ for salvation.” This is, no doubt, the great, and, in some senses, the singular ‘ perfection’ of the work ; and it is this distinction which will especially commend it to enlightened and experimental Christians of every name. To them Christ is ‘ all in all ;’ he is their wisdom, righteousness, and strength. They feel that the ‘ new life’ in them has all its springs in Christ—as he says ‘ I am the truth and the life, and without me ye can do nothing.’ It is a principle equally applicable to

every variety of human character, that in the work of salvation God has nothing to do with us, nor have we any thing to do with him out of Christ. We are first ‘babes in Christ;’ then, grow to the ‘measure of the stature of perfect men in him,’ having all the while ‘*through him* access by one Spirit unto the Father,’ and ‘to the grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.’ He is the great channel through which all the mercies of God flow down to us, and our returns of love and service must ascend through the same, as having no value which they do not derive from him, and as depending alone on his mediation for acceptance. Herein are we accomplished and God glorified.

There is, indeed, an incomprehensible fulness in the blessings of the ‘Better Covenant,’ which must fill the soul of a thoughtful penitent with wonder and admiration; but it is all the ‘fulness of God’ in Christ. In the illustration of this great truth, Mr. Goode seems to have left no difficulty, no error, in the reasoning and practice of saint or sinner, untouched,—sounding alarm at every danger, exposing every false refuge, pressing every call for repentance and faith, laying open every fountain of consolation and hope,—and all with a spirit of meekness and affection, and in a style simple, animated, and flowing as with an intelligence that feels its clearness and foresees its destination.

It is to be feared that Christians of this day do not give sufficient attention to the storing of their minds with gospel truth; that they do not so much seek the springs of action in the truth as in representations of it which excite without enlightening and establishing them in it. The reading of this volume will show them the great importance of a correct understanding and an earnest love of the truth as that wherein they most honour God, best promote their

sanctification, renew their strength and zeal, and attain to 'the confidence of a certain faith, and the comfort of a reasonable, religious, and holy hope.'

Desirous of obtaining more knowledge of the author and of the estimation in which his work was held by others, especially in England, we addressed a letter to the Bishop of Ohio, to which the following is his reply. A testimony, so full and earnest, to the merits of the work, from so competent a judge, cannot fail to have its due weight with the Christian public.

Gambier, Ohio, Jan. 26, 1836.

REV. AND DEAR SIR—

I had just written to a bookseller in Philadelphia, in reference to an American edition of Goode's "Better Covenant," when your letter on the same subject was received.

I am truly rejoiced that the theological literature of this country is to be enriched with the addition of so excellent a work. Perhaps my attachment to it derives some force from a personal acquaintance with the author—whose simple, humble, affectionate, and very positive character as a Christian, united with the soundness of his attainments as a scholar, and the godly earnestness and faithfulness of his work as a preacher of Christ, is calculated exceedingly to win the affections of a brother in the ministry, and to bespeak a welcome for any work of his hands.

Mr. Goode, at first a Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, where he enjoyed the richest advantages in adding to his faith—knowledge, and whatever is of good report in any department of intellectual improvement, was subsequently and for several years of his ministry attached to the service of the East India Company as one of its Chaplains. At Calcutta, he studied the gospel in the circumstances of its primitive conflicts, and grew in the experience of its preciousness in the society of those men of God who during the last few years have gone from the Church of England to that of India, and whose praise is in all the churches. From considerations of health he is now in England, exercising his ministry at Clapham. His work on the Better Covenant was first published in 1833. The copy in my possession is of a second edition. The

book, as well as its author, is in high estimation, for sound divinity and an admirable exhibition of its experimental applications, among that class of the clergy of the Church of England whose writings are best known in this country. As a book of divinity—divinity as it should be, not cold and abstract and dead, freezing the affections while it exercises the intellect, but retaining the living beauty and heart-affecting interest of the revelation it proceeds from—divinity adapted to the intellectual wants of the closest student of divine truth, while it provides the simplest and sweetest nourishment for the spiritual necessities of the humblest Christian;—as a book of practical piety, especially in regard to the display it gives of the nothingness of the sinner out of Christ, and the completeness of the believer in Christ, and its tendency to promote a spirit of active, cheerful, happy obedience, by all those motives of thankfulness, love, praise, and joyful hope which belong to “the adoption of sons,” I know of no book of the present age more valuable. Students in Divinity will find it a book to be *studied*. Readers of devotional writings will find it full of divine knowledge, of experimental truth, and of excitements to prayer and praise.

The writer is what is usually called a moderate Calvinist. Of this, his book is sometimes the evidence. Some may not relish it on this account. They will find however that his Calvinism is not controversial—not a cold, polemic abstraction; and though they should not like it after perusing his work, any more than before, I doubt whether Episcopalians of this description can compare his views with those of the articles of their Church, without acknowledging that he bears the test of our doctrinal standards as easily as themselves. On this subject, I should exceedingly regret the rise of any controversy in our Church. Suffice it to say, that the Calvinism of Mr. Goode is just that by which such beloved brethren and shining lights in the Church of England as the patriarchal Simeon of Cambridge, the devoted Wilson of the See of Calcutta, the Bickersteths, the Noels, the Bridges, the Pratts, and, I think I may say, the Sumners of Winchester and Chester, are distinguished, in common with a blessed company of those who, in all the good works of England, are among the most devoted. Well satisfied as they are, that such views are, at once, the doctrines of Scripture and the true interpretation of the formularies of their own Church; they would, I am persuaded, unanimously

concur in the substance of the language of the Rev. Henry Elunt in his late Discourses on the thirty-nine Articles. "Although we thus clearly state our own conviction of the sentiments of our Church upon this point, we would desire to exercise the greatest moderation while maintaining them. We believe that many holy men, who are ranged among her true and attached followers, do not view this subject in the same light. We are unable to agree with them; but this difference of sentiment neither diminishes our respect for their piety, nor our opinion of their sincerity, or of their judgment. We are willing to concede to them the point that these doctrines are not to be brought forward in the ordinary course of Christian instruction, in any other, or more prominent positions than they occupy in the revealed word of our God. We are willing to consider them, not as topics of discussion for the young Christian, but as consolations for the established believer, as the solace of the depressed, the sustenance of the fainting, the support of the departing servants of the Lord; and surely they who differ from us should, on their part, be willing to concede to us, that if we believe we find such doctrines in the word of God, and if we feel them to be necessary to our own stability, and to our own comfort, we should be left in the peaceful enjoyment of them, without having deductions which we never draw, and conclusions which we never arrive at, forced upon us as our own, and the horrible consequences of these horrible deductions and conclusions visited upon our heads. However, then, we may differ upon these high subjects, which, after all, must ever be more speculative than practical, let us, my brethren, resolve that, as regards ourselves, they shall never, under any degree of provocation, lead us to the adoption of bitterness of language or acerbity of feeling, or even to the diminution of Christian love towards those of whom, whatever be the difference between us upon these mysterious points, we believe, and rejoice to believe, that they are the followers of the same Master, with a love as fervent, and a service as acceptable, as the best among ourselves."

Alas! where would have been the present divisions and heart-woes of the Christian family, if the spirit of the above quotation had always reigned in the necessary discussions of truth? Must not such a spirit return to the church catholic, till like the church in Jerusalem, the multitude of them that believe shall be "of one heart and one soul," (whatever varieties of opinion on subordinate sub-

jects may exist,) continuing steadfastly not only *in one doctrine*, but *one fellowship*, before we can expect such mighty victories of the gospel, as those of its apostolic age, or as those which the whole word of prophecy teaches us to hope for?

My dear sir, that the work of which I have been writing, and which you lead me soon to look for from the American press, may be blessed of God to the leading of many souls to saving and enlarged views of the unspeakable love of God in the covenant of redemption, by Jesus Christ, is the prayer of

Your affectionate brother,

CHAS. P. MILVAINE.

REV. H. HOOKER.

THE

AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

It is with much diffidence that the following pages are presented to the public eye. The subject of which they treat is one of deep interest and importance. In its full extent it embraces the whole compass of revealed truth, and has accordingly been made the basis of several well-known systematic treatises on divinity. The present work, however, has not the slightest pretensions to be added to their number. It professes only to be a somewhat copious examination of the several promises of the COVENANT OF GRACE, as contained in the 31st chapter of the Prophecy of Jeremiah, and quoted from thence by St. Paul, in the 8th chapter of his Epistle to the Hebrews.

This covenant of grace, in other words, the GOSPEL COVENANT, is that dispensation of God under which we live, and by which alone God will deal with men in a way of favour, or bestow eternal life. It is the *only* ground of hope for a sinner, in his sight; and as such, we are called upon, in Scripture, to renounce every other dependence, to give up all hope of life from that legal dispensation, or covenant of works, under which we are by nature, and heartily to close with this BETTER COVENANT, that we may be saved according to the gracious tenor of it. It is, therefore, a matter of indispensable necessity to every man, that he be intimately acquainted with its proper character and provisions. A misapprehension of these, through wilful neglect, or prejudice of a carnal and self-righteous spirit,

must inevitably issue in the most tremendous consequences. And yet, it is to be feared, very many, who live under the *sound* of the gospel, are in gross darkness, as to its real nature and value.

Confused or unsettled views of the same blessed "covenant of peace," in Christ Jesus, are but too common among the people of God,—those who have a *real* interest in its unspeakable blessings. Many, even of them, have but a very indistinct and inadequate perception of its grace, and live altogether below their privileges. The consequence is, they are continually liable to be distressed, in various ways, by their subtle adversary, who well knows how to take advantage of their ignorance, and weakness of faith: their spiritual experience is one of frequent bitterness, and their progress in the divine life grievously interrupted. For, of all truths, I am persuaded, there is none to which a Christian will more readily respond than to this,—that the soul is vigorous, the affections heavenly, and growth in holiness real and abundant, exactly in proportion as the believer has a firm hold on the free, full, sure, and everlasting grace of the gospel, walks in the joyful sense of it, as secured to him in covenant, and so experiences "the love of God shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost." This intimate connexion between the *consolations* of the gospel, and that *holiness* of Christian walk whereby the believer glorifies God, is strikingly exhibited by the prophet, (Isa. lxi. 1—3,) with the former part of which passage our Lord opened his gospel, in the synagogue of Nazareth. (Luke iv.) "The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach *good tidings* unto the meek: he hath sent me *to bind up* the broken-hearted; to proclaim *liberty* to the captives, and the *opening of the prison* to them that are bound; to proclaim the *acceptable* year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance

of our God; to *comfort* all that mourn; to appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to *give* unto them *beauty* for ashes, the *oil of joy* for mourning, the *garment of praise* for the spirit of heaviness." And *why* all this? "That they might be called TREES OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, the planting of the Lord, THAT HE MIGHT BE GLORIFIED." These living waters of the wells of salvation can alone refresh and fertilize the soul, and enable it to bring forth the abundant "fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the glory and praise of God." To preach (as we must preach) the need of holiness in the believer, and to rest the attainment of it upon any other grounds than a sense of free salvation, (not *procured by* holiness, but bestowed as the *means* thereto,) is like crying to the wretched prisoner in a dungeon,—Be free,—while we take not off his chains. Tell him of salvation as the *gift* of God in Christ Jesus, (1 John v. 11,) "not by works of righteousness which he has done, but according to God's mercy," (Tit. iii. 5,) and the man has encouragements and motives which he never had before. Before, he was to *purchase* life by holiness, and the task was hopeless. Now, he is to *enjoy* by it a life *freely given* him in Christ. He sees the light of day: he feels the beams of the Sun of righteousness: and he would as soon abide among the dead, as go back to that darkness, and the deeds of it, in which once he lived even as others. This unutterable love of God, to one so undeserving, constrains even his hard heart to love again: and "this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments."

Considerations of this nature led me, in the autumn of last year, to bring the subject of the covenant of grace, fully, before the flock to whom I minister, in a course of sermons, to which the present volume owes its existence.

My original intention was simply to have printed the course, in compliance with the wishes of several who heard

it. But, in preparing the volume for publication, I was induced to enlarge upon the subject of each discourse, from a desire of making it somewhat more complete than the limits of a sermon will permit. With what success this has been done, must be left to the judgment of others. The change of plan has cost me no little labour, and occasioned an unlooked-for delay. I shall be thankful, if the addition of matter make as much amends to the reader, as the preparation of it has yielded pleasure and profit to myself.

The discourse on Phil. ii. 12, 13, is not strictly connected with the subject of the covenant: but the points which it embraces are of the utmost importance, and such as the mind is naturally led to, from a consideration of the *grace* of the gospel, on the one hand, and of its practical *obligations* on the other. Both these are remarkably combined in this passage, which occurred in the second lesson for the Sunday following that on which the last discourse on the covenant was delivered. An examination of it appeared, therefore, to be peculiarly appropriate, as a conclusion of the whole subject. For this reason the consideration of it is introduced here.

I have advanced nothing but what I am deeply persuaded is the truth of God.

Such as it is, I commend it humbly to the divine blessing. May it be the means of refreshing the people of the Lord in their warfare, of establishing their faith and hope in Christ, and of leading them into larger enjoyment of the "fulness of blessing" of "the everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure!"

Clapham, May 14, 1833.

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PART I.

THE BETTER COVENANT.

HEBREWS viii. 6.—*But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also is he the mediator of A BETTER COVENANT, which was established upon better promises.*

AN inquiry of infinite moment naturally suggests itself to the mind of every man who is awakened to a real concern about his soul. On *what terms* may I draw near to God? What are the *principles* by which he regulates his dealings with me, and by which it is therefore my wisdom to regulate my hopes?

To satisfy this inquiry is the leading object of the few following discourses: to point out the “everlasting consolation, and good hope through grace,” which God has given to us in his word: the sure foundation laid therein on which a guilty troubled soul may rest, under a sense of sin to be removed, in its present conflict with evil, and in the awful prospect of death and judgment.

Men in general concern themselves but little with any terms of salvation which God has made known to them in the Scriptures; but every one hopes to be saved according to some scheme of his *own* contriving, on certain conditions which may approve themselves

to *his* mind as reasonable and proper; never considering that the God to whom "salvation belongeth" has himself absolutely fixed the methods of it, and demands our conformity to them if we would attain it. But there are others who *do* concern themselves, and that deeply, in this important inquiry, whose views are yet exceedingly obscure. They see little of the riches of redeeming grace in the gospel—its freeness, its fulness; and still less the *sure* and unchangeable grounds of its enjoyment, as laid in the everlasting purpose and faithful promises of a *covenant* God in Christ Jesus. They take not *these* as their *warrant* for expecting the *unmerited* bestowal of all spiritual blessings. They have heard of this grace, and they *like* to hear of it; but their hearts misgive them when they would appropriate it. Sensible feelings of spiritual comfort, pleasant frames in prayer and other divine ordinances, duties well performed, comparative quietness of conscience—these are the wretched (because ever varying) grounds on which too many of God's dear children rest their hopes of his favour; by these they deem it reasonable to conclude their interest, or otherwise, in his salvation. In a word, some *meetness in themselves* for covenant blessing is thought to be necessary, as a *title* for its enjoyment; and this subtle form of self-righteousness effectually takes them off from resting simply on the grace and truth of God revealed in the gospel.

If then we would give to God the glory of his own salvation, if we would attain to any thing like a settled peace in believing, or joy in the Holy Ghost, or other fruits of righteousness, if we would know how to manage aright our painful warfare against the "sin that

dwelleth in us," nothing is more necessary than to get clear and steady views to the nature of that dispensation of grace under which we live; to know well in what that grace consists, whence it springs, how it is communicated, and by whom it may be enjoyed.

Such is the subject which is at present to occupy our attention. May the good Spirit of Jesus, "the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him," bless the consideration of it to our souls, enlightening the eyes of our understanding, "that we may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe." We shall find the subject eminently suited, with his blessing, thus to enlarge our views, strengthen our faith and hope in the gospel, and animate us to renewed zeal and diligence in our walk with God.

I propose to open it by a few remarks,—

I. On the general notion of a covenant of God with man.

II. On the particular features of this "BETTER COVENANT."

III. On the administration of it by Christ, as Mediator.

I. On the general notion of a covenant of God with man.

By a covenant among men we understand an agreement or compact, by which the parties bind themselves, and each the other, to the fulfilment of certain conditions. When such a covenant has been duly ratified,

it is thenceforward binding on both, and either party is accounted infamous who shall recede from the terms of it without the consent of the other. When therefore a person is under covenant to perform certain things stipulated therein, we have the strongest security which man can devise that his conduct will be ordered according to the tenor of it.

Now, when we speak of a covenant of God with men, one important difference is to be observed. In this case there is no natural equality between the parties, nor independence of one upon the other, and therefore no such mutual adjustment of terms may take place between them. God wills, and man must obey. But this revealed mind and purpose of God is called a covenant, because,

1. As respects *God*, he who has no rule of action but his own will is pleased hereby to bind himself, in his dealings with men, to the observance of certain specified terms.

2. As respects *men*, they are bound to fulfil the conditions herein prescribed to them, under pain of forfeiting the offered benefits, and incurring the attendant penalties.

A covenant further supposes the existence of peace and mutual good-will between the contracting parties, or is a basis of reconciliation between such as have been at enmity. In this respect the covenants of God and of men agree.

A covenant *of peace*, made in the case of previous enmity existing between the parties, must be negotiated *by a mediator*, with whom the terms on either side may be arranged; and who is surety to both for the

fulfilment of the conditions on which it is to rest. But in the case of previous good-will no mediator is required.

Further, a covenant supposes mutual advantage resulting from it to the parties concerned, with a view to which it is entered into. The advantage in any covenant of God is obvious, as respects man. The advantage (so to speak) which God aims at herein is, the delight of his own nature in the exercise of goodness, the communication of blessing to his creature; which he therefore bestows *by covenant*, to assure man of its unchangeable character, by the obligation under which he is thus pleased to lay himself.

Such is the general notion of a covenant as made by God with his creatures: it expresses "the immutability of his counsel." God's ways, whether of mercy or of judgment, are not arbitrary: all proceed strictly according to a method laid down by himself, and revealed in his word for our guidance. Clearly then, our hopes and prospects depend, entirely, upon the nature of that *particular* covenant or dispensation of God under which it may be *our* lot to live. General notions of mercy, not directed by God's revelation of his mind towards us, or an unauthorized blending of the grace of one covenant with the meritorious obedience of another, will prove vain and ruinous in the issue. On the other hand, great and unmerited as may be the blessings held out to men under any dispensation, this name, *covenant*, under which God has taught us to contemplate it, forbids us to doubt their sure communication to all who come to him in his appointed way for their bestowal.

It is plain, from the word of God, that there are TWO COVENANTS in which men are principally concerned, and upon the terms of one or other of which they must stand for life or death before God.

The covenant under which all men are born, as children of Adam, is that OF WORKS; and under this they *continue*, until, *of their own accord*, they abandon it, as one by which they can only merit death. This is, in other words, the moral law, which was the law of Adam's nature, written in his heart while he continued in his integrity, and was given afterwards formally, and in detail, from Mount Sinai, for discovering to his posterity the conditions of life or death eternal, to which, as creatures of God, they are naturally subject. Its terms, spiritually understood, are, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." (Luke x. 27; Mark xii. 29—31; from Deut. vi. 5, and Lev. xix. 18.) The sanctions by which it is enforced are, on the one hand, "This do, and thou shalt live;" (Luke x. 28, from Lev. xviii. 5;) and on the other, "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." (Gal. iii. 10, from Deut. xxvii. 26.)

All men who live and die, as they are born, under this covenant, are dealt with according to the exact tenor of it. Of mercy to transgressors the law knows absolutely nothing. It is a law for man, as God made man—*perfect*—and to man in *this* condition, and in *this only*, it was a law that could give life.

It must be evident to every one, that, if he be

tried according to the letter of this covenant, there remains no hope for him before God, for he is a transgressor of it from the womb. And thus the Scriptures everywhere testify, "As many as are of the works of the law are *under the curse.*" (Gal. iii. 10.) "The law worketh *wrath.*" (Rom. iv. 15.) "Now we know that, what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law, that *every mouth* may be *stopped*, and *all the world* may become *guilty* before God : therefore, by the deeds of the law there shall no *flesh* be justified in his sight ; for by the law is the *knowledge of sin.*" (Rom. iii. 19, 20.)

This covenant, then, is one by which an *unfallen* being, continuing in his obedience to it, may *merit* life : but to creatures such as we are, who are *by birth* fallen and corrupt, destitute of the divine image of holiness, it is a dispensation only of death. Such must be the issue to every man who is vainly endeavouring to make up a righteousness of his own, that shall answer the demands of it. God has bound himself, yea, the necessity of his nature, as a perfect being, binds him to bring the penalty of it upon all who are guilty of the least breach of it, in thought, word, or deed ; not only in the letter, but the spiritual import of it. For "the law is spiritual." And let men plead what they may of mercy in God, and good intention in themselves, unless they will *first abandon all hope* of salvation *on the ground of obedience to this covenant*, without doubt they must perish everlastingly.

We are led then to the inquiry—Is there any *other* covenant or dispensation of God for his creatures,

whereby (letting go the first, and laying hold on this) we may have that eternal life and blessedness which we have irrecoverably forfeited by the first?

Blessed be God, such a covenant there is. The terms of it are fully made known to us in the gospel of Jesus Christ, the "glad tidings of great joy." No such provision was made for angels that sinned, and "kept not their first estate; but, for fallen man, God has framed a dispensation of mercy, suitable in every respect to the circumstances in which he is; designed to raise him out of the ruins of the fall to "glory, and honour, and immortality."

This dispensation, like the former, is also called his COVENANT, because by it God is graciously pleased to bind both himself and us.

He pledges *himself* to deal according to it, with every one who gives up entirely his hope of life by the works of the first covenant, and embraces this, pleading the gracious provisions of it for acceptance with God.

And he commands *all* men to submit themselves to the terms of it for obtaining life, or, which is the same thing, cordially to accept its free salvation. It is the only constitution by which God will bestow life, and we are bound to receive it as such, at the peril of our souls.

In this latter view, as *imperative* on men, the gospel itself, like the former covenant of works, is spoken of under the name of a LAW. So of Messiah, (Isa. xlii. 4,) "The isles shall wait for his *law*." And St. Paul calls it, the *law* of faith, (Rom. iii. 27,) the *law* of righteousness. (Rom. ix. 31. Compare also Isa. ii. 3, and James

ii. 25.) Accordingly, in my text it is called a covenant which was *established*, *νενομοθέτηται*, literally, which has the force of *law*.

The notion, in the term *covenant*, added to that of *law*, is, that, by the former, God binds *himself as well* as us; whereas a law relates only to *one* party, and is not binding on the supreme lawgiver.

The covenant which we are now considering is usually called, by divines, the COVENANT OF GRACE, as it is grace that especially distinguishes it from the former, or Adamic covenant of works. A frequent name of it in Scripture is, the covenant of *peace*. (Isa. liv. 10.)

The death and resurrection of Christ completed this covenant, which was formally “established,” with its ordinances of worship, on the day of Pentecost. But, *before* this time, it existed *virtually*, that is, *in promise*; and was *the only way from the beginning in which any soul of man was ever eternally saved*. The glory of the gospel days consists, not in our having a new and easier way revealed of being saved, but in having it *fully* revealed and firmly *established*, in all its liberty, spirituality, and completeness of blessing. Ancient believers were saved in the very same way; (Gal. iii. 8; Heb. iv. 2;) but they saw not so distinctly the characters of it; the Sun of righteousness had not *risen* upon them; they had but the twilight glimmerings, some gradually increasing tokens of his future glorious shining.

The earliest intimation of this covenant of grace was given in the promise to our first parents, that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent’s head;

it was further revealed, and the features of it more distinctly marked, in the promise to Abraham, (Gen. xv. 6,) which, as the apostle instructs us, (Gal. iii. 8. 15—18,) was virtually this very covenant of grace, though the particulars of it were still dimly seen, when viewed through the distance of nearly two thousand years, and enwrapped in the brief comprehensiveness of prophetic declaration. (Compare Luke i. 72, 73.)

That we may see somewhat of its excellence, and be persuaded to forsake every other ground of confidence before God, let us examine together,

II. The particular features of this “BETTER COVENANT, which was established upon better promises.”

It must be carefully observed, that the covenant to which this is here preferred is not that of works, but one, in point of time and character, *intermediate* to the two—the national covenant made with Israel at Mount Sinai, the mediator of which was Moses, and the ministry of which, throughout the term of its continuance, was committed to the sons of Aaron. That this is the covenant referred to here is clear from verse 9 of this chapter, where God calls it, “the covenant that I made with their fathers, in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt.” This covenant was *faulty*, (verse 7,) except as introductory to that which was to succeed it. It was partly a covenant of works, resting its blessings on Israel’s fulfilment of certain conditions, (for instance, the possession of the promised land on their national adherence of the worship of the true God,) and further, as reviving the moral law, in all the exactness of its

requirements, and the terrors of its curse. (Deut. iv. 13.) It is on this account chiefly, as having the original covenant *of works* incorporated in it, that the gospel covenant is here so greatly preferred to it. At the same time, it differed from the original covenant of works, inasmuch as it had provisions of grace, ordinances *typical of the mercy* designed for men *in the gospel*, and ministering this grace and mercy, though by shadows only, to the people of God. It may thus be considered as a republication, for a particular temporary purpose, of the old covenant of works, with appendages intended to mark man's need of some *better way*, and symbolizing that way.

The new covenant, of which Christ is mediator, *is* that better way itself. "A better covenant, established upon better promises."

To see this, we have only to consider its promises, as they lie before us in the passage connected with my text. (ver. 10—12.) I may here notice, that the whole context, from verse 8 to 12, is quoted, with little variation, from the prophecy of Jeremiah, (xxxi. 31—34,) and relates *primarily* to the *literal* Israel, in whom, *as a nation*, it is to have a grand and ultimate accomplishment.

‘FOR THIS IS THE COVENANT THAT I WILL MAKE WITH THE HOUSE OF ISRAEL AFTER THOSE DAYS, SAITH THE LORD ; I WILL PUT MY LAWS INTO THEIR MIND, AND WRITE THEM IN THEIR HEARTS : AND I WILL BE TO THEM A GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE TO ME A PEOPLE : AND THEY SHALL NOT TEACH EVERY MAN HIS NEIGHBOUR, AND EVERY MAN HIS BROTHER, SAYING, KNOW THE LORD: FOR ALL SHALL KNOW ME,

FROM THE LEAST TO THE GREATEST. FOR I WILL BE MERCIFUL TO THEIR UNRIGHTEOUSNESS, AND THEIR SINS AND THEIR INIQUITIES WILL I REMEMBER NO MORE."

I propose, with the divine blessing, to make each of these promises the subject of separate and particular consideration.

But let us mark, at present, the grand features by which this covenant is *distinguished* from all other that preceded it, that of Abraham excepted, which was virtually this very covenant in prospect.

The prominent characteristic of this covenant, from which it has its name, is—GRACE—exceeding riches of pardoning mercy, shown to men *as sinners*. Thus the Holy Ghost, by the mouth of Zacharias, beautifully describes the gospel as "*salvation, BY PARDON, through the tender mercy of our God.*" Herein it is in direct opposition to the covenant of works, the rewards of which rest on *merit* in the creature. "*This do, and thou shalt live.*" But the blessings of *this* covenant are grounded purely, on mercy to unrighteousness. I will do thus and thus, saith God, "FOR I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."

Whereas, then, in the old covenant, something is required on the part of man *as a title* to its privileges, this contemplates in him nothing but sins and unrighteousness, and lays the basis of all covenant good vouchsafed to him in the *sovereign grace* of God, a promise, as large and unlimited as language can express, of the *free removal* of sins, and that *for ever*. Herein, beloved, is summed up all the grace of the covenant,

that it *supposes guilt* of every kind and degree in the objects of it, and meets them with this cheering assurance,—I will be merciful to it, I will remember it no more.

But has God, then, *deserted his justice*, in showing mercy to a sinner, and *dishonoured his law*, by suffering the violation of it with impunity? God forbid! The condition of life under the new covenant is, precisely, that of the old—*perfect obedience*. But, under the gospel, this obedience is rendered *for* the sinner, by his *surety*: and the life which is its due becomes his, not by *working*, but by *believing*. Christ has *fulfilled* the law *for us*. *Mercy*, therefore, *to man*, is the just *reward of merit in Christ*. In him, God can be a *just* God, and yet the *justifier of the sinner*, (apart from all consideration of goodness in him,) simply as *believing* in Jesus. All this we shall see, more fully, hereafter.

But again, compare with this the *Jewish* covenant. That had indeed provisions of grace; it had its prescribed sacrifices, and divers washings; and these conferred a *ceremonial* freedom from moral guilt and defilement; but they “could not make him that did the service *perfect*, as pertaining to the *conscience*.” (Heb. ix. 9.) “In those sacrifices there was a *remembrance again* made of sins, *every year*. For it was not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should *take away* sins.” (Heb. x. 3, 4.) Moreover, for many offences (of a presumptuous kind) there was *no atonement* appointed by the law. But, in this better covenant, there is a cleansing *from ALL sin* by the blood of Christ. (1 John i. 7.) “By him *all that believe* are

justified from *all* things.” (Acts xiii. 39.) He is that “Lamb of God which *taketh away* the sin of the world.” Contemplate in yourselves all unrighteousness, sins, and iniquities whatsoever, “This is my covenant,” saith God, “I will be merciful to it, I will remember them no more.”

Mark another feature, no less distinguishing the gospel as a “ministration of glory.” This is—*the exceeding fulness of its promised blessings.*

The foundation of them is (as we have seen) mercy, by the will of God, to a poor, vile, perishing offender. When such a one lays hold of this covenant, and pleads the grace promised in it as the basis of all God’s dealings with men unto salvation, then these blessings flow down into his soul. They are in detail as follows:—

- (1.) Divine renewal ;
- (2.) Divine relationship ;
- (3.) Divine illumination.

(1.) *Renewal of the Divine Image.* “I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts.”

The effacing of these by the fall destroyed man, and brought all his misery upon him ; and it is very encouraging to a guilty sinner to observe that this promise evidently *supposes the absence* of a principle of holiness in the objects of it, and engages to *create* it in them anew ; it is a promise *only suitable* to those who are sensible that they are *without holiness*. God promises to put in them his own perfect law, “holy and just and good,” the law of his own nature, and

therefore the law of blessedness to every intelligent being. God will make his people holy, because he will make them happy. Further, the law is not given in *this* covenant, as at Mount Sinai, on tables of *stone*, but graven on “fleshy tables of the heart.” (2 Cor. iii. 3.) It is the creation of a new divine principle of holiness that is here promised, which shall *rule* in the soul; enlightening the understanding, and captivating the affections to willing obedience. Hence while the believer is eternally delivered from the law as a covenant, in which respect it “gendereth to bondage,” (Gal. iv. 24,) while he receives the life he once sought to merit by it as a “*free gift*” of God in Christ, he yet “delights in this law of God after the inward man :” he walks conformably to it, in love, “being not without law to God, but *under the law to Christ.*” (1 Cor. ix. 21.)

Further, God is himself the immediate agent in this mighty work. “*I will put*”—“*I will write,*” and therefore it is done effectually, through the energy of the eternal Spirit.

(2.) *Divine relationship* renewed between God and the soul of man. “I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.” Man, as a sinner, is cast out from the favour of God, regarded as a rebel under the curse. But the covenant founded on mercy to unrighteousness has in it the promise of *restoration* to the divine favour, and that to the largest possible extent. God says here, not only, “I will be to them a father,” or any such *finite* relation, but, to include these in a name which contains the sum of all that is glorious and gracious, “I,” saith he, “will be to them

A GOD.” There is no attribute of my nature but I will have it, I will exercise it, toward them and for them ; I will be to them, what I am to myself, a fountain of consummate happiness. “ And they shall be to me a people ;” not, as Israel of old, by *external* relation only, but a *spiritual* people, a *peculiar* people, “ formed for myself, they shall show forth my praise.” (Isa. xliii. 21.)

(3.) *Divine illumination.* “ They shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for *all shall know me*, from the least to the greatest.”

Mark how God seems to disparage all the knowledge of himself which was enjoyed under the old dispensation, in comparison with that which is here promised. The Jews, though truly in covenant with God as a nation, knew, many of them, nothing of him. They needed continual exhortations from their judges, prophets, and pious rulers, to “ know the Lord.” The *mode* also, as well as the extent, of God’s revelation of himself was inferior. The teaching which the Jews had respecting God was, for the most part, by types and shadows, and sensible images of spiritual mysteries, ill understood by the generality of that nation. A veil was upon their faces, that they discerned not the real glory of the dispensation under which they lived. Their whole system required much and painful explanation from the wiser among them as to its spiritual import, and that which was to be known of God by it. They needed a mutual communication of light received upon it from time to time, as persons helping one another in the dark. Such was

the character of that knowledge of God which was afforded *by the covenant* under which they were. Whatever was vouchsafed beside was of mere sovereignty, and much even of that obscure: the prophets themselves "*searching what*, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ which was in them *did signify*, . . . to whom it was revealed, that *not unto themselves*, but unto us they did minister" (1 Pet. i. 11, 12.)

But, under this "better covenant," we have the *substance* of the shadows, the *reality* of the types: Jesus Christ; "him of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write," "full of grace and truth."—The manifestation of the Father's love. "The brightness of his glory, the express image of his person." Moreover, the Spirit of God is himself the great teacher of his covenant people. (John xiv. 26 ; xvi. 13.) There is now, therefore, an enlarged knowledge of God ; such a knowledge of the mystery of his person as the Triune Jehovah, of his character and grace, in the gospel of Jesus Christ, as "in former ages was not made known unto the sons of men." But, now, there is *not one* in covenant with God who has not his measure of this blessed knowledge : the *least*, as well as the greatest, is privileged to enjoy it : the babe in the school of Christ has a clear understanding of those things which the holiest of the Old Testament saints saw but darkly, if at all, under the law.

Such is the exceeding fulness of blessings promised in the covenant to those who are interested therein ; all resting on free mercy and grace in God, as the

ground of their communication to unworthy, sinful men. I proceed to notice a third feature in it especially deserving our attention, arising out of the freeness of grace which is its basis. This is,

Its security—The effectual provision which God has made in it for the *sure* enjoyment of its rich benefits. In other covenants God pledges himself to what he will do for his people on the supposition of *their* fulfilment of certain terms contained therein. But here we find him engaging, not only for his own part, but *for theirs also*. “I will,” and “they shall.” “They *shall be* to me a people.” “All *shall know* me.”

This, then, is a very peculiar distinction and glory of the “better covenant,” that in it God is pledged to accomplish by his Spirit, in the hearts of his people, all that is necessary for their enjoyment of its blessings. There can be no forfeiture of them from the folly and waywardness of the creature ; for this covenant takes the sinner up, as it finds him, in his sin and ruin ; freely “*justifies the ungodly* ;” (Rom. iv. 5;) and then for the rest, it consists of full and absolute promises to fulfil *in* him all that can make him well pleasing to God. Thus is it a covenant “ordered in all things and sure ;” (2 Sam. xxiii. 5;) a rock on which the most guilty may build his hopes for eternity, and he has the truth of the unchangeable God to rely on, that his hope shall never make him ashamed. The security of it lies herein, that God undertakes *for man* as well as for himself.

There is yet one more feature of this better covenant which demands our attention, and which is closely connected with the preceding. This is,

Its everlasting continuance.—Hence it is expressly called “the everlasting covenant.” The objection which God takes to the old covenant, *contrasting* it herein with the new, fully establishes this truth. It shall not be, saith God, according to the former covenant made with their fathers at Sinai,—and why not? “Because they *continued not* in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.” Nothing can be more evident, than that this new covenant was to be so ordered as to have a *different issue*—it was a covenant to *be continued in*. See, again, how God expresses this in the chapter of Jeremiah following that from which this whole passage is taken. (Jer. xxxii. 40.) “And I will make an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them to do them good; but *I will put my fear into their hearts, that they shall not depart from me.*”

Contemplate, then, this covenant, brethren, in the amazing *freeness* of its forgiving grace, in the exceeding *fulness* of its promised blessings, (divine renewal, divine relationship, and divine illumination,) in the absolute *security* given for their enjoyment, by the pledge of God that he *will*, and that *man shall*, and in the *everlastingness* of its continuance—and say, if its treasures of goodness do not surpass all that heart of man could have conceived. O that, with David, the language of our souls may be, “This is all my salvation, and all my desire !”

The consideration of the Lord Christ, as administering this covenant in the character of Mediator, we must defer to a future opportunity, if God will : but I cannot leave the view we have been taking of the

THE BETTER COVENANT.

wondrous grace brought nigh to us in the gospel without suggesting a few practical lessons which flow immediately from it. Learn, first,

1. The overwhelming motives afforded us, by this covenant of grace, to walk before God in all holiness and godliness of living.

This is the great end and design of God in its establishment. "The grace of God, which bringeth salvation, hath appeared unto all men, teaching us, that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live righteously, soberly, and godly, in this present world." (Tit. ii. 12.) It brings with it such revelations of love in God, such assurances of pardoning mercy, helping grace, preserving care, and unchangeable loving-kindness, that when it is really apprehended, and believed in, as the very truth of God, it is as "life from the dead" to the soul.

This blessed gospel comes down to the deepest abyss of spiritual misery in which man is lying: finds him out in his rebellions—his heart steeled, by guilt and sense of deserved wrath, from humbling himself before God; averse from holiness, while he is ignorantly and proudly standing to make terms with God, on the ground of a righteousness to be performed by himself, that may appease his anger.

God, in mercy, applying the holy law to his conscience for the discovery of his sin and ruin, convinces him of the utter impossibility of salvation by it: and, having thus brought down the stubborn heart, he puts into the hands of the self-condemned and despairing sinner a free and full pardon. There,—saith God, in the gospel of Jesus Christ,—take pardons for all. I

have pitied you, though you have hated me: My beloved Son has atoned for these sins of yours. I am satisfied through *his* work, when you are content to plead it. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." And as I have provided a way for *bringing about* this reconciliation, so I have provided also for *keeping* this peace always. You have a stony heart, I will make it a heart of flesh; a corrupt and rebellious heart, I will put my laws in it, that you shall love and choose me. You have been far off from me, and I from you, but "return unto me, for I have redeemed you." I will be to you a God, and my Spirit shall put you, and effectually preserve you, among my people. You have been ignorant of, and alienated from me, but I will manifest myself unto you; yea, I "will come unto you, and make my abode with you." And all this, not for desert in you, but because, by Christ's work, I can be a just God and yet a Saviour; because "I will be merciful to your unrighteousness, and will remember your sins no more."

My brethren, what think you is the result, when these blessings of the covenant of grace are realized? when the man feels that this is indeed "the word of the truth of the gospel," fulfilling its name, "glad tidings of great joy?" that so God will deal with *him*, when he will come to him on these terms?

The dead starts to a new and blessed life; the prisoner of sin and Satan bursts his chains; he comes out of darkness into God's marvellous light, out of the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God: the truth makes him free, and he is free indeed. O, saith he, I have *done with sin*; I can

never love it, never serve it, as I have done. There is life *for me!* free pardon, free promises—these “gifts for the rebellious”—have done for me what no terrors, no threatenings, no convictions could effect: they have *drawn* me to God and holiness. My God is Love; and, for love’s sake, I henceforth give myself up to be the Lord’s. “The *love of Christ* constraineth me.” *By the mercies of God*, I present my body a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto him, which is my reasonable service. (2 Cor. v. 14. Rom. xii. 1.)

Beloved, herein is eminently displayed the “power of God, and the wisdom of God,” in the gospel. The religion of the believer is a religion springing out of gratitude and love. God has conquered his enmity by kindness; heaped coals of fire on his head, and melted his hard heart unto obedience. “We love him, *because he first loved us.*”

Hence the Scriptures everywhere enforce its precepts and calls to holiness by such motives. “*Having, therefore, these promises*, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves.” “Walk in love, *as Christ also loved us*, and gave himself for us.” O my brethren, you know nothing of this covenant of grace yet as you ought to know, if it have not taught you thus to live. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” “He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.”

Take this, then, as a first and most important lesson from the subject we have been considering. Learn,

2. The grievous sin of those who carelessly neglect this covenant of grace, or obstinately refuse to close with it.

Before any man can plead the provisions of a covenant in his own favour, he must be *personally* interested in it. Its terms, whatever be their grace, are, otherwise, of no avail to him. Now bear in mind, brethren, that by nature you are interested in *quite another* covenant—that of works; and you are bound to fulfil its provisions, or you must perish. But Christ having satisfied *for you* the demands of that covenant, and endured for you its penalties, has thus legally procured a release for you from it, and in the gospel he sends you word that you may be free from it; calls upon you to *use* your freedom; to declare off from all connexion with it as a covenant, and cease, for the future, from all attempts, more or less, to merit life and salvation by it. “Now we are *delivered from the law*, that being dead wherein we were held.” (Rom. vii. 6.) “Ye are *not under the law*, but under grace.” (Rom. vi. 14.) “Christ is the *end of the law for righteousness*, to every one that believeth.” (Rom. x. 4.) “Christ hath *delivered us from the curse of the law*, being made a curse for us.”

Understand then, beloved, God makes known to you, in the gospel, *another* way than that of works, a way of *grace*, for obtaining life. *Renounce*, saith he, *wholly*, that first covenant: it will only destroy you, if you seek its blessings by attempting to fulfil its terms: this way is closed against you, as a sinner, for ever. It is equal folly to think of *combining* the *mercy* of the new covenant with the *merit* required by the old; if you will plead merit *at all*, you remain yet under the covenant of works; you have no part in grace. “Christ is become of no effect unto you, who-

soever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace.” “If by grace, then is it no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace; otherwise work is no more work.”

Pray God, my brethren, for “spiritual understanding” in this matter: one in which the ignorance and pride of nature awfully blind the eyes of men. They cannot *conceive* of good-will in God towards them, apart from something done *by themselves* to procure it: or they *abhor* to be saved in such a way, so humbling to nature, constraining them to admit that, after their best endeavours, they are, in themselves, only vile, deserving of nothing but perdition, except as *Christ’s merits*, made theirs, shall avail to rescue them. Hence men insist on being saved some other way, in which themselves may, more or less, have a *share*. They “trample under foot the Son of God, and count the blood of the covenant wherewith he was sanctified an unholy thing, and do despite to the Spirit of grace.” O sinners, as you would not perish under a condemnation more terrible than that of Sodom, in the day of judgment, reject not, trifle not with this covenant. “There remaineth no more sacrifice for sins;” (Heb. x. 26;) no other way of deliverance from that covenant of works, the awful terms of which, if you pretend to fulfil them, or to compound for them with God, will be a mill-stone round your neck, to sink you into bottomless perdition. “How shall we escape,” asks the apostle, “if we neglect so great salvation?”—If, in the carelessness of a worldly, or the prejudice of a self-righteous spirit, we receive this

grace of God in vain; call ourselves Christians, are received by baptism into covenant, and never *accept* Christ according to the terms of it; but live and die, trying to earn salvation by good works done, or to be done, by us, instead of receiving salvation as a free gift, and then serving God in love, not for obtaining life, but in gratitude for its free bestowal? Learn, further,—

3. The abundant encouragement which this covenant holds out, to the most guilty and desponding sinner, to return to God, and be at peace.

O that I could think, saith the burdened sinner, this grace were for such as I am; that I could feel myself *authorized* to lay hold on it; it would be heaven begun to call this salvation mine.

My beloved brethren, *what would* assure your hearts that you were authorized so to do? Surely nothing in yourselves, for then “grace” would be “no more grace.” O beware of this self-righteousness, which holds you off from free salvation, till you find something *in yourselves* to merit it. Your authority to lay hold on it and rejoice in it is, that God has revealed this covenant, and established it as the ground on which “whosoever will” may draw nigh to him and live. “Ho,” saith he, (Isa. lv. 1,) “*every one* that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money . . . Incline your ear, and come unto me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make *an everlasting covenant* with you, even the *sure mercies* of David.” See now, beloved, you that thirst after “grace, mercy, and peace,” from God in Christ, and

are hesitating about his readiness to deal thus with you, because of your manifold and great offences, your sense of deep depravity, *see here his willingness to receive you*. This is his constituted covenant rule of conduct towards returning sinners; he has *bound* himself so to deal with every creature who will embrace this appointed method of salvation. Do we tell you, then, you *may* close with this offered grace? we say more: you *must*, you are *commanded* so to do. It is the *law* which God has established for every fallen sinner that hears this gospel, that he come and treat with God, for the life of his soul, only in this way. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he *that believeth not* shall be damned." *It is not the greatness of your sins that is the bar to your salvation, but unbelief; not the want of mercy in God, but the want of faith in you to close with this covenant, in which life and every blessing is freely made over to you in Christ: a covenant founded on free forgiveness of all iniquity, consisting of exceeding great and precious promises from him who is able to make them good, and having no other conditions to be fulfilled, on man's part, than simply to accept its grace.* By baptism you are the children of this covenant, which is man's seal, as it were, set to it, signifying his assent to it: its privileges are hereby yours, as those of the old covenant were Israel's by circumcision. Sue them out, then; act on them as such; and "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus." Renew this covenant between God and you, in the exercise of faith, as the church of old is represented

saying by the prophet, (Jer. l. 5,) "Come and let us join ourselves to the Lord, in a perpetual covenant, that shall not be forgotten."

4. Lastly, let the established believer recognise in this covenant the charter of all his privileges. Ever rejoice, my Christian brethren, in your *entire* deliverance from the law of works, as a means of obtaining life. Life is yours by free gift, covenant gift of God, through faith in Christ Jesus. Having the Son, you have life. Only abide, then, in him, your covenant head, and walk worthy of your exalted privileges, in all holy and happy obedience. Beg of God to reveal the free, full, sure, and everlasting blessings of this covenant, with growing light and power, to your souls. It is his own promise to his people. "The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and *he will show them his covenant.*" If you would have any settled enjoyment of religion, any pleasantness of walk with God, you must learn thus to *rest* in God as your *covenant God*; to trace up all your mercies, as "*sure mercies,*" to this never-failing source of them; to take its amazing promises, and plead them with him, in full confidence of faith. "He hath commanded his covenant for ever." "The mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, nor the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee."

PART II.

CHRIST THE MEDIATOR OF THE BETTER COVENANT.

HEBREWS viii. 6.—*But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of A BETTER COVENANT, which was established upon better promises.*

HAVING considered the peculiar *character* of that better covenant of which Jesus is Mediator, we are now to dwell more particularly upon his *administration* of it as such: a subject full of encouragement, and opening the brightest views that can be presented to the eye of faith on this side eternity. May the blessed Spirit of God, brethren, strengthen our souls, while we meditate upon his testimony; that we may behold and triumph in the glory of the person of Jesus, in the perfection of his work, in the all-sufficiency of his intercession, who is “the apostle and high priest of our profession.”

In contemplating, as we have so lately done, the distinguishing features of the better covenant—exceeding freeness of pardoning grace, fulness of promised blessings, and security for their everlasting enjoyment—two inquiries seem naturally to suggest themselves:

one, To what are we indebted for these amazing benefits? The other, How are they to be enjoyed? What is the *channel* by which God has ordained the communication and actual experience of them? Now, either of these inquiries instantly leads our minds to the consideration of the Lord Jesus Christ, ministering this covenant as the Mediator, in all respects, between God and us. "There is one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus."

Such a mediator is absolutely required by the circumstances of man as a sinner; and this necessity is the first point that must engage our attention. Man cannot come to God, and treat with him, immediately, in his own person. The two are, by nature, at utter enmity; and until the grounds of it be completely removed, there is no *possibility* of intercourse.

God, however willing he be to make his creature happy by communion with himself, cannot compromise his essential perfections, and dishonour them in the face of all intelligent beings, by admitting a rebel, with guilt unatoned for, into his presence and favour. And as for man, he not only has, of himself, no *will* for reconciliation, not only *likes* to be at a distance from God, but if, from conviction of danger or misery in this condition, he desire to return, he *cannot* take a single step thereto. The holy law instantly arrests him with demands of perfect obedience, and curses him from God as a transgressor. The holiness of the divine nature, the righteous requirements of the divine government, the truth of the divine word—all these are as lightnings that dart forth on every side against the sinner, and make God "a consuming fire" to all

who would approach him in that character.* The sinner *may not* come : he has no invitation, no permission to treat with God in his own person ; he can offer nothing that should prevail with God to lay aside these terrors ; and if, in proud defiance of warning, he venture before him with some wretched plea of personal goodness, some price in his hand of repentance, or duties performed, that, with more or less of Christ's grace, are to buy him pardon and favour from God, he will meet with nothing but hell from his frown : and so the punishment of sinners who obey not the gospel of Christ is expressed by "destruction *from the presence of the Lord.*" "*Depart from me, ye cursed.*" Indeed, the man who has any suitable apprehensions of the divine character *dares not* come before God. He feels that he is a sinner, and God an avenger ; and as Adam "hid himself from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden," so now, men, either by open neglect of religion, or by substitution of forms and ceremonies, and body worship, in the place of spiritual communion, shun God and labour to keep at a distance from him.

Hence it is clear that, if any reconciliation is to take place between man and God, there needs a mediator ; and the particulars referred to above show also what are the qualifications essential to such a mediator. He must be *of dignity* suitable to treat with God on man's behalf. He must have some *right to be accepted as the representative* of men. He must be *sufficient*

* Such is the experience of every awakened sinner of the influence of the law of God in his heart.

surety for both parties: for men, to satisfy all demands of God's righteousness, which on his part preclude reconciliation ; and for God, to quiet effectually all guilty fears and doubts, on man's part, of his perfect willingness to receive, pardon, and bless him. In a word, he must be such as *both* can fully rest on, for the removal of every bar to peace, and the procuring of perfect good-will between them.

Where shall such a mediator be found ? the highest archangel is still a creature ; has no dignity but what God has put upon him : moreover, if he were *able* to satisfy for man, he is not of man's nature, and therefore *cannot represent* him ; his satisfaction would have no connexion with those for whom he offered it ; and being, as a creature, infinitely inferior to him for whom he acted, he could give no pledge for God, sufficient to reassure the conscience of a sinner. Who shall give security for God, but one equal with himself ? Clearly, he that is to be mediator between God and man must have the nature of both.

Blessed be God, such a mediator is found in the person of Jesus, the incarnate Word. The double nature of the God-man, Christ Jesus, gives security, to both parties, for the fulfilment of all that is necessary, on either side, for peace. While, as man, he can give security to God on our behalf,—as the eternal Word, equal with the Father, he gives security to us for God. The highest pledge that can be taken of a monarch for his observance of a treaty is, when a member of his family, his own child, is retained by those concerned, as a hostage. So, when God would assure men of the “immutability of his counsel” of peace, he gave his

only begotten Son to be one of them—to be retained, as it were, in their own nature, a pledge that he will make good all his word. O the wondrous depths of divine love that are treasured up in the person of Christ !

View him again as man : as such, he was qualified to render, for us, all that is needed to win *justice itself* to the side of mercy, and make it glorious in God to admit a hell-deserving sinner, without plea or merit of any kind but in Christ, to perfect favour, and friendly fellowship with himself. Hence, when Jesus came into the world, the angelic choir proclaimed, “Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, goodwill toward men.” Hence the cheering assurance of the apostle, “We have *boldness* to enter into the holiest *by the blood of Jesus.*” Through him God and sinners may be at one again. He is that ladder which Jacob saw, set up on earth in his human nature, and reaching to heaven in his divine nature ; and God stands above it, and communes with his creature at the foot of it ; and angels pass and repass upon it, ministering for the heirs of salvation : a beautiful emblem, signifying renewed intercourse of God and men, earth and heaven, in a way of peace, through the person of a mediator.

God has, from the beginning, marked mediation as the only way of access to himself. The institution of sacrifices, immediately that man fell, had no other object : they were of no efficacy, but as they showed forth the great Mediator, through whom, as slain for us, we draw near to God. The rejection of Cain’s offering was owing to a want of acknowledgment in it

of this great truth ; it was one that man might have made *in innocence* ; but it recognised not his guilt and need of mediation, as a *fallen* being ; it was not offered, as the “more excellent sacrifice” of Abel was, “by faith” in another for acceptance with God, and “the Lord had not respect unto it.” (Gen. iv. 5. Heb. xi. 4.) Under the Sinai covenant, the institution of the Levitical priesthood, and especially of the priesthood of Aaron and his successors, taught the same lesson. The man who presumed to offer his sacrifice at any place but the tabernacle, or through any medium but of the priest, was to be cut off from his people. (Lev. xvii. 3, 4.) What was necessary in the type is still more so in respect of the great Anti-type. “No man cometh unto the Father but by him.” All worship of God (as men pretend) in the works of creation which leaves out of sight human guilt, all offerings of religious service of the most splendid and costly kind, all mortifications, and penances, and laborious works wrought to procure divine favour, independent of Christ, and to introduce men to God for their own sake, are abomination in his sight. The sinner is required to do nothing, for acceptance, but lay down the arms of his rebellion, own himself a guilty and perishing creature, cast himself upon mercy, and put his case (as one who has no liberty otherwise to speak with God) into the hands of Him who is appointed to be between God and sinners for effecting reconciliation.

But we must now consider the mediation of Christ more particularly in connexion with the better covenant of which the apostle is here treating. “He is the mediator of a better covenant.” This covenant is *the*

basis of reconciliation, and therefore, from what has been said, must be ordered with *him*, prior to any part taken by men thereto.

The covenant of grace is, strictly speaking, made between God and Christ: and, in this view, is part of that great covenant of redemption, ordered from eternity between the persons of the Godhead. Man is a party to it only in the *second* instance, as he is viewed *in Christ*, coming in for the blessings of it by his surety's fulfilment of its terms. To him we are indebted for its grace; and through him alone it has all its efficacy in the experience of redeemed sinners. Not that this is to be understood to the exclusion of the other persons of the blessed Trinity. There is no mercy dispensed to men, but the Father's free and everlasting love is the origin and fountain of it. There is no blessing they receive, but God the Spirit is the immediate bestower of it upon them. But yet, the Father's love rests on the Son's voluntary undertaking, as opening the only channel through which it can flow to man; and it is equally in virtue of the same work that the Holy Spirit (therefore called "the Spirit of Christ") ministers the blessings of the covenant to the heirs of promise. But it is Jesus who stands as the "daysman" between the parties to be reconciled, that can "lay his hand upon them both." Job. ix 33.) The terms of reconciliation were *arranged* with Christ, and agreed to by him from eternity; when he became incarnate, he *fulfilled* them for man, and made them known to him; and now, as the risen and ascended Saviour, he *pleads* them before the throne of God, in behalf of all that come unto God by him.

The covenant of grace is thus wholly a covenant “confirmed of God in Christ.” It owes its free and gracious *character* to Christ’s *engagements* with the Father from eternity: its *establishment* with men, in time, to his *sacrifice* of himself for them: and its continual *efficacy*, in the experience of an elect people, to his *intercession* for them above. In all these respects is Christ “the Mediator of the better covenant.”

These are the three parts of the mediation of Christ on which I purpose now to dwell. The consideration of these several particulars will open to us, with the blessing of God, more of the unalterable security of the everlasting covenant, and will animate our souls to seek with renewed ardour that grace which it so richly contains.

We are to consider, then, the mediation of Christ,

- I. As it began in eternity.
- II. As it was carried on upon earth.
- III. As it is completed in heaven.

I. Let us consider it, as it began in eternity. The covenant of grace is often called the *new* covenant: (see ver. 8;) and hence the books of the New Testament are distinguished by this name from those of the Old Testament, or old covenant, as they reveal with the greatest clearness its character and provisions. But we are not to understand, by this title, that it had *no existence* before the coming of Christ; for, in truth, it is the oldest covenant (if we consider it in *time* only) of all that were ever made with fallen man. It is called new, only as respects the nation of Israel; having been “*established*” many ages *after the Mosaic*

covenant, and intended to supersede it. (See ver. 13. Heb. vii. 12. 18. 2 Cor. iii. 11.) But the covenant made with Abraham, four hundred and thirty years before the giving of the law, was one precisely of the same character;—it was a covenant *of promise*—a “covenant which was confirmed of God *in Christ*,” (Gal. iii. 17;) and so was, *in substance*, the same gospel which is preached to us. (Gal. iii. 8.) The promise of it, “In thee shall all nations be blessed,” has its fulfilment in the person of Christ.

But, brethren, the antiquity of this covenant of grace goes beyond all time: it is, indeed, without beginning, having existed in God from all eternity; and this is one reason why it is called the “*everlasting* covenant.” As there never was a moment in which God was not, so never was there a moment in which this grace to man was not the determinate counsel and object of delight of the Eternal mind. The purpose of redemption was not (as many unworthily think of it) a purpose conceived only when man fell, to remedy a mischief never contemplated till then. “Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.” Rather, the whole mystery of grace in the gospel, yea, creation itself, with all its consequences, is a result of the purpose of God to make, in the person of Christ, the most illustrious display, before all intelligent creatures, of the glories of the divine nature, by man’s redemption.

God, being infinitely good, cannot but take supreme delight in the exercise and manifestation of his own perfections; and in this the bliss of all created intelligences necessarily consists. Hence that ascription of

praise, in the sacramental service of our Church, "We give thanks to thee for thy great glory."

This, then, was the great end which God had in view in the counsels of redemption; and herein,

1. *The display of the attribute of love* in a way totally different from any in which it had been witnessed, or in which its exercise could have been conceived, before: not towards *sinless* beings, but to fallen men, deserving of God's hottest displeasure. God, designing his own glory in Christ, resolved on the manifestation of it, not, as in the case of fallen angels, by the everlasting *destruction* of the offending race, but by providing, in the unsearchable riches of his mercy, *redemption*, through the sacrifice of Christ, for the whole family of rebel man. By redemption I mean, here, the removal of all existing obstacles, on God's part, to perfect reconciliation between him and men; so making the bestowal of all spiritual blessings on them that believe consistent with the honour of the divine character.

This provision for men is general; not only *sufficient* for all, but one *in which all are interested*, without exception or limitation. Hence the gospel is called, (Tit. iii. 4,) "The kindness and *love* of God our Saviour *toward man*." "God so loved *the world*." "He sent his Son to be the Saviour *of the world*." Christ "gave himself a ransom, a redemption price in their stead, *for all*." "A propitiation . . . for the sins *of the whole world*." (1 John ii. 2.) "He tasted death for *every man*." Hence the commission of the ministers of Christ is, Preach the gospel to *every creature*, (*εὐαγγέλιον*, *good news*.) In it, therefore, every

creature must have a personal interest; and the good news can be nothing less than what the angel announced, when he made the first proclamation of this gospel to the shepherds, "*Unto you* is born a Saviour." The same is our message to all men, without exception. A ransom has been given for the *human race*, and you, as *one* of that race, are interested in it. "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself:" "be you reconciled."

The holiness, the truth, the justice of God, form so many barriers, as it were, preventing all approach of sinners to him. Now the gospel is the counsel of God's love, whereby, in infinite wisdom, he "has broken the gates of brass, and cut the bars of iron in sunder." In Christ, "mercy and truth are met together;" the prison doors are taken away; and the ambassadors of Christ may say to the prisoners, without distinction, "Go forth." (Isa. xlix. 9.) Nothing, *on the part of God*, interposes any longer between you and salvation; the impossibilities which lay in the way are removed by Christ, the gift of God's love to men, who is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (2 Pet. iii. 9.) "Who will have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of the truth;" (1 Tim. ii. 4;) and if men will not, the reason is to be found, not in God as the withholder, but in themselves, as wilful rejecters of the benefit. "*Ye will not* come to me, that ye might have life."

Herein, brethren, had there never been an individual of the human race willing to *receive* the blessing, was a demonstration, on God's part, of his love toward man. The benefit is real and incalculable, apart from all con-

sideration of man's acceptance or rejection of it. And this was one object of God in the counsels of redemption. A second object was,

2. *The glorious exercise of his absolute and uncontrollable sovereignty*, in them that are saved, and in them that perish.

Had man been left to himself, immeasurable as is the love manifested towards him in Christ, not one soul had ever embraced it, or turned it to any thing but his own aggravated condemnation. "No man," saith Christ, (John vi. 44,) "*can* come to me, except the Father which sent me draw him." And coupling this with the charge, "*Ye will not* come to me, that ye might have life," we clearly perceive that the impossibility lies not in the nature of things, but in the deadly aversion of the sinner's heart from God: an impossibility, therefore, which is the very climax of man's guilt. "This is the condemnation, that men *love* darkness rather than light;" so love it, that therefore, and therefore only, they cannot leave it.

But, whatever be the cause, the truth itself is unaltered. Man, left to himself, will rather perish than return: and, therefore, the same sovereignty which passed by angels, and looked on men, to *provide* redemption, distinguished, from the beginning, an elect people from among men, to whom that redemption should be effectually *applied*, through the Spirit, unto their everlasting salvation; who should be "*willing in the day of his power.*" (Ps. cx. 3.) We are not indeed to suppose that God, in thus distinguishing men into "vessels of wrath," and "vessels of mercy," acts without a reason: for "he worketh all things after the

counsel of his own will." (Eph. i. 11.) But reasons *out of himself* he has none. He doeth what pleaseth him. No cause can be assigned, why, when the same provision is made alike for all, one is taken, and another left, but that which he gives himself, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." (Rom. ix. 15; from Exod. xxxiii. 19.)

From this sovereignty of God in the *particular application* of redemption results a further display of his glory, thereby, in two respects.

(1.) *Of his righteousness and justice* in the condemnation of the finally impenitent and unbelieving. This righteousness of God in taking vengeance *needed* no gospel indeed for its discovery; but it is exceedingly *magnified* thereby. The conduct of sinners in wilfully rejecting the free gift of pardon and eternal life, provided for them, and awaiting their acceptance, in Christ,—so *abhorring* to come to God in the gospel, that they *cannot* come,—resisting infinite love at the peril of their souls,—marks a depth of malignity in sin before inconceivable. It is *now* manifest, in the sight of all intelligent creatures, what is *the extent* of the enmity that is in sin against God—an enmity, not created by *impossibility* of return to him, but which can resist all overtures of peace from God himself—all demonstration of his infinite compassion, in the free gift of the beloved of his bosom to be a sacrifice for man's sin. Unbelief is the crowning sin of all who receive this grace of God in vain: (a consideration which of itself shows the reality of their interest in the *provision* of it.) "He that *believeth not* shall be

damned.” Surely, when this extreme malignity of sin shall be seen as it really is, there will be but one acclamation among the assembled throng before the judgment throne, “Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.” (Rev. xvi. 7.)

This glory, then, of God’s righteousness and justice, in the perdition of the finally impenitent, was another end, designed, in the manifold wisdom of God, by redemption; and, in this view, the work of Christ was not in vain, even as respects those who are not finally benefited by it.

(2.) *The “praise of the glory of his grace,” power, and wisdom*, in the effectual salvation of a peculiar people, chosen from among men, and ordained from eternity hereunto. This is set forth at large by the apostle, (Eph. i. 3—8:) “Blessed,” he says, “be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as he hath chosen us *out* (ἐξελέξατο) in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love:” (mark, it is an election to holiness and love, to grace, that it may be to glory. Compare 2 Thess. ii. 13; 1 Pet. i. 2.) “Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved; in whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence.”

To this effect is the statement of the doctrine in our

seventeenth Article : “Predestination to life is the everlasting purpose of God, whereby, before the foundations of the world were laid, he hath constantly decreed by his counsel, secret to us, to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ out of mankind, and to bring them by Christ to everlasting salvation, as vessels made to honour. Wherefore, they which be endued with so excellent a benefit of God be called, according to God’s purpose, by his Spirit working in due season; they, through grace, obey the calling; they be justified freely; they be made sons of God by adoption; they be made like the image of his only begotten Son Jesus Christ; (aluding to Rom. viii. 29;) they walk religiously in good works; and, at length, by God’s mercy, they attain to everlasting felicity.”

This, then, as respects man, we may call *the highest end of God in redemption*: the triumph of his love : that which he specially aimed at therein. This was the object for delight in which the Son voluntarily gave himself to become incarnate—the providing eternal life for as many as God had given him. He laid down his life for *his sheep*. These were to be the reward of his sufferings, in whom he should “see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied;” (Isa. liii. 11;) in whom *propitiation* for sin should issue in the everlasting *removal* of sin, through the effectual grace of the Spirit. In them and by them was supereminently to be displayed the glory of each of the persons of the blessed Trinity.

Creation itself originated in this purpose of God to glorify himself in the redemption of the church. So

the apostle teaches us, when he calls the gospel, "the mystery which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ, (*mark the reason,*) to the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known *by the church* the manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord."

This eternal purpose of God, you observe, is purposed *in Christ*. And why in Christ? but because the work upon which the execution of that purpose rests was to be accomplished by him in the fulness of time; because, moreover, all the particulars of it were arranged, as we have said, with Christ, and were agreed to by him in the counsels of the Godhead.

The Father, setting his love upon an elect people from among men, gave them to the Son, who covenanted to redeem them at the price of his own blood. You have the conditions of this engagement noticed, (Isa. liii. 10,) "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed." In virtue of this offering of Christ, the Father engaged for the free bestowal of all that amazing grace, all those rich blessings, which we have been so recently considering; and God the Spirit engaged to minister that grace, and make it *effectual* in the hearts of his people; to gather in the whole family of his elect, from the beginning to the end of time.

Do any ask, then, Whence is this grace to me, who am so vile, so unworthy of it all? Here is the answer. Jesus, as the mediator between God and man, is the "Surety of the better covenant," who

has fulfilled all the terms upon which it rests. It has no terms for *us* to fulfil, beyond the acceptance of the blessing, because, in his infinite love to man, he accomplished in his own person all that was needed, that God might be a just God, and yet a Saviour. Thou shalt lay their sins, said he, on me, and not impute to them their trespasses ; thou shalt be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities thou shalt remember no more. And further, the merit of my righteousness shall be theirs, and for its sake thou shalt bless them, in me, with the fulness of all spiritual blessings—divine renewal, divine relationship, divine enlightening ; it shall be *grace to them*, because it is *desert to me*, through my work. Now, surely, brethren, we see in this *a reason* for all the grace of the covenant ; we have no longer occasion to marvel at such blessings, so freely bestowed on guilty man ; the reason of it all is, grace arranged with Christ, pledged to us in Christ from eternity, himself being the surety to render, on our account, all that the perfections of God made necessary for peace ; all that should make *us* infinitely *worthy* of that immensity of blessing which God has to give. Hence those praises of the apostle, already noticed, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” So again, writing to Timothy, he says, “Who hath saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose, and *grace* which was *given us in Christ Jesus* before the world began.” In the same manner, writing to Titus, (i. 2,) he speaks of the “hope of

eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, *promised before the world began.*" And to whom did he promise it but to the Son? It was "grace given to us *in Christ,*" who was from the beginning the mediator of this better covenant.

Learn, then, dearly beloved, as many of you as "have tasted that the Lord is gracious," whence this grace springs; on what a sure foundation it rests. If the Lord have "drawn you with loving-kindness," it is because he hath "loved you with an everlasting love." (Jer. xxxi. 3.) This grace of God is no purpose of yesterday, which may change with the perpetual changes of which you are conscious, and which rob you of your peace and joy. It was laid up for you from eternity with God. Then his heart was towards you, before creation started into being. Then it was his plan to bring you to himself. Then your divine Surety pledged himself to all that was necessary for your redemption, and the blessed Spirit of God engaged to perfect this grace in you, till you were ripe for glory. No ages have altered this everlasting design of God; no multitude of counsels have diverted his thoughts from its accomplishment; no aggravated offences have caused him to repent of his purpose. His eye saw you, when as yet you were not: his providence has brought you into being; and his grace, beginning in eternity, has brought you into *second* being, and will presently issue in never-ending blessedness and glory, in the immediate vision of your God. O, brethren, if you would have any comfort of hope towards God, realize the mediation of Christ for you, as it began in eternity. See the whole mystery of

redeeming love as it was ordered there ; put in train there ; every possible impediment anticipated, and Jesus pledged for its removal, that Father, Son, and Spirit might joy over you forever as a ransomed being. Surely there is no such resting-place for a guilty anxious soul, as that which is found in the contemplation of the covenant of grace as a plan ordered of God, before time was, for eminently setting forth his own glory in his people's blessedness.

The terms on which this covenant of grace rests having been thus ordered between Father, Son, and Spirit, in the Divine counsels, and the Son having undertaken, according to them, to accomplish for us, as our surety, all that was necessary to secure the free grant of its blessings, it became him, in the fulness of time, to take upon him our nature—the nature in which sin had been committed, and in which therefore atonement must be made: man must make amends for man's sin. Hence “the word was *made flesh*, and dwelt among us.” And in this character,—“Emmanuel, God with us,”—“the *Messenger* of the covenant,”—anointed by the Spirit without measure—he executed those engagements into which he had voluntarily entered. “He gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God, for a sweet-smelling savour.” (Eph. v. 2.) “By himself he purged our sins.” (Heb. i. 3.) We are led then to consider the mediation of Christ, in the second place,

II. As it was carried on upon earth.

With his incarnation commenced that active ministry of which the apostle is here speaking as “more

excellent" than that of Aaron, above which it is one great object of this epistle to exalt it. The main intention of this earthly ministry of Christ was to make atonement. "Without shedding of blood there is no remission." (Heb. ix. 22.) And remission of sins being the foundation stone upon which the whole covenant of grace rests, (Luke i. 77,) the blood of the surety was necessary to ratify it, and so confirm its blessings to the sinner. He appeared, therefore, upon earth in the double character of Offerer and Offering, Priest and Victim; and his infinite sufficiency for both these characters rests upon the union of the divine and human nature in the one person of Christ.

Consider him, brethren, as our Offering. In his humanity he was perfectly holy, having no spot or taint of sin, either original or actual. With this express object his body was formed by the immediate energy of the Holy Ghost, contrary to the order of natural generation, in the womb of a virgin; and therefore it was said to her, "*that holy thing* which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God." Thus, while he was bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, very man of the substance of his mother, he was yet without sin. Agreeably to this it is declared of him, that he knew no sin; (2 Cor. v. 21;) not only *did* it not, but *knew* it not. It was *not in him*. (1 John iii. 5.) "The prince of this world cometh," saith he, "and *hath nothing in me*." He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, and *separate* from sinners." "A Lamb without blemish and without spot." He was especially distinguished above the priests of the Mosaic economy,

in that *they had* infirmity, *he not*. Hence he was (what otherwise he could not have been) an unspotted and suitable offering for men: and suitable, also, in this respect, that he partook of the nature of those who had offended. Thus he acquired a *right* to redeem. He was truly man, and therefore he could legitimately present himself to God for the expiation of the guilt of man, his brother. This, indeed, was a principal reason of his incarnation. "*Forasmuch, then, as the children are partakers of flesh and blood*, he also himself likewise took part of the same, that through death," &c. (Heb. ii. 14.)

Again, by the union of Deity with his humanity a *value* was added to his sufferings, which made them commensurate, yea more, (for here is finite against infinite,) I say, more than commensurate with all conceivable amount of human guilt. His elect are therefore called, (Acts xx. 28,) "*the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.*" Yes, beloved, the God-man Christ Jesus has bled for sinners! O, when the burden of guilt is intolerable to a wounded conscience, set this consideration against it, and see if it do not outweigh it all. "It is Christ that died!" A price all price beyond, for guilt which, however aggravated its character, however vast its amount, is, at the most, not infinite. "Though your sins, then, be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow, though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." How does every view we take of this adorable Emmanuel increase our discoveries of his matchless love! How should it inflame our affections, and bind us to him in sweet

returns of love and obedience! "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, unto him be glory!"

His Deity, also, *enabled* him to sustain those unknown terrors of the wrath of God which would have consumed a universe of *created* beings, though all their capabilities of endurance had been concentrated in a single individual of them. Their pressure caused even that Holy One, though supported by Deity, to sweat great drops of blood, and to entreat that, if it were possible, the cup might pass from him. Such was the price that our adorable Mediator paid, to procure for us the blessings of the covenant! Such the sacrifice which the Father was content to make of his well-beloved Son, that he might bestow them! "For this cause he is the mediator of the new covenant, that *by means of death*, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance." While, then, we rejoice in the riches of pardoning grace, the free mercy of the covenant, let us never, never forget to what we owe it. It is to "the precious *blood* of Christ." Let us daily abhor the sin that could only be so atoned for, and gain, from the cross of Christ, deeper views of its malignity than any sight beside can give. Let us learn, also, how inconceivably offensive to God is their sin, who are thinking to make atonement, and obtain the benefits of the covenant, by a righteousness of their own, which is to *share* the merit of their salvation with the sacrifice of Christ. "Our God is a consuming fire." Such is his aspect towards all who would be saved in any other

way than by the virtue of this one offering of the Lamb of God.

But mark further, that Christ was not only the offering, but himself the Offerer. He came into the world for this very purpose: voluntarily took upon himself creature-existence, that he might offer up himself. (Heb. vii. 27.) "The bread," saith he, (John vi. 51,) "that I will give is my flesh, which *I will give* for the life of the world." Two peculiarities are to be remarked as distinguishing this creature-life of Christ from that of all other, and which enabled this great high priest of our profession to make it an offering to God, all-sufficient for the sins of men.

1. It was the life of a *sinless* being, and so was altogether *unforfeited*; it was that which he had *to give* to God, *in exchange* for his people, who are therefore called, (Eph. i. 14,) "the *purchased* possession;" the law of God had no claim upon it, except as he voluntarily subjected himself to its curse for us. Observe his words: "Therefore doth my Father love me, *because I lay down my life* that I may take it again. No man (rather, no one, *οὐδείς*, neither God nor man,) taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself; I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again: this commandment have I received of my Father." Death is the wages of sin; and had Christ taken upon him, as some assert, sinful flesh, his life had been *necessarily* forfeited to God's broken law: he would have lien, as we do, under the effects of that sentence, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." The Scripture speaks accurately on this point, when it describes him, (Rom. viii.

3,) as sent "in the *likeness* of sinful flesh." He appeared not among us exempt, as Adam was, from all the infirmities which, though sinless in themselves, are the fruits of sin, the effects of the curse which he underwent for us. He wept, he hungered, he was weary, he suffered from the suggestions and fiery darts of the tempter, in a world where all was under the tempter's influence. This Adam did not, and could not: he was a happy being in a happy world. Fallen humanity, then, *in this sense*, Christ shared in common with his brethren: he was made in all things like unto them; (Heb. ii. 17;) but sinful flesh he had not: yet had he the *likeness* of it. There was nothing, in his outward appearance or circumstances, to distinguish his flesh from that of others, in which sin is inherent by ordinary generation: he came to our wretched prison-house, and wore in it our garb,—a garb which none but a criminal had ever been seen in before, and he looked to us as altogether one of us. But, blessed be God, "in him was no sin;" and because there was none, he had his life free to part with, and, by parting with it, to receive, in return, our redemption from everlasting ruin. Indeed, upon any other supposition, the death of Christ could be of no more value for procuring grace to the sinner than the death of any other man.

2. While it was *human* life, it was life taken into union with Deity; and so it was not only of infinite value, (as we have already seen,) but this priest as well as victim possessed in himself infinite *ability* both to lay it down, and to take it again. In the power of his Godhead he offered up himself without spot to God;

and having, by the same divine power, raised himself from the grave, he is gone, not (as the priests went) into the "holy places made with hands, which were the *figures* of the true; but into heaven itself, there to appear in the presence of God for us." (Heb. ix. 24.)

But let us look at the effect of this atonement which Christ, as our high priest, made for the sins of men, in reference to the covenant of which we are treating. The blood of Jesus Christ is represented by himself, and throughout this epistle, as the *ratification* of the covenant. "This," saith he, "is my blood of the New Testament, (or covenant,) which is shed for many, for the remission of sins." So in this epistle, (chap. xiii. 20,) it is called "the blood of the everlasting covenant." It was his blood-shedding which ratified it. The atonement of Christ sealed for ever the covenant of grace, of which he is the Mediator. It was the fulfilling of every condition upon which God had suspended the free communication of grace to the sons of men; it broke down every barrier to the freest, largest exercise of "grace, mercy, and peace," to the most guilty of Adam's race. Henceforth, God "is *faithful* and *just* to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 John i. 9.) The Son of God, our surety, has executed all the engagements of the covenant, has done all that he undertook to do. O then, what shall we say more, to quiet the harassed conscience, and encourage the sinner to lay hold on this grace? Brethren, it is infamous, even with worms like ourselves, to refuse the fulfilment of a contract, under such circumstances. Grace, vast as it is to us, loses its character, when considered with reference to

Christ. It is *debt* to him. God, in dispensing his blessings without money and without price to those who come to him through Christ, does but fulfil the truth of his engagements to his Son, when, as Mediator, he made, by his one offering of himself, full satisfaction to God on man's behalf.

Such, then, was the effect of Christ's ministry, on earth, as the Mediator of the better covenant. It was a redeeming of the pledges which he had given from eternity, upon which depended the communication of grace to sinners. And now, in the last place, let us follow him to his glory, and consider the mediation of Christ,

III. As it is completed in heaven.

Thither "the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." (Heb. vi. 20.) That same Jesus who died on Calvary has ascended, in our nature, to carry on the purposes of his grace in the hearts of his people. Having left his mediatorial throne to suffer for sins, he reassumed it, on his ascension, in a new character, man for men: as such he reigns "a PRIEST UPON HIS THRONE," (Zech. vi. 13,) our true Melchisedec, king and priest both in one person; having all power given him in heaven and in earth to give eternal life to his people, and pleading their cause, as their ever-living "advocate with the Father." (Matt. xxviii. 18. John xvii. 2, and 1 John ii. 2.) These, then, are the two features of his heavenly mediation which must briefly occupy our attention.

1. *His priestly intercession.* He was a priest from

the beginning, in virtue of his *anticipated*, as now, of his completed sacrifice. This he was on earth, when he “offered up himself” as “a sacrifice to God ;” and this he is still, and ever will be, while there remains a single soul of his elect to be brought to glory. “This man, because he continueth for ever, hath an *unchangeable* priesthood.” “Thou art a priest *for ever*, after the order of Melchisedec.” (Heb. vii. 24. Ps. cx. 4.) His intercession above gives efficacy to his offering of himself on earth. If he had not been a priest on earth, he could not have been a priest in heaven ; for he would have had nothing to carry within the veil, wherewith to make propitiation. But as the high priest under the law went into the holy place, “*not without blood,*” so Christ “*by his own blood entered in* once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.” (Heb. ix. 7. 12.) That blood he now presents and sprinkles before the mercy-seat ; and on the ground of it he claims, for returning sinners, the fulfilment of all the grace of the covenant, as the reward of his sacrifice.

Beloved, what strong consolation is here to every one of us who come unto God through Christ ! Is it “Christ that died ?”—“Yea, rather,” saith the apostle, “that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.” (Rom. viii. 34.) So again he describes him, (Heb. vii. 25,) as “able to save them to the uttermost (*εἰς τὸ παντελὲς*) that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.” Our *tittle*, then, to all covenant blessings is the death of our Surety, and he who died for us now lives for us : lives *to plead* our

title to those blessings. Hence the apostle infers the surpassing assurance which believers may *now* have of his saving grace, when he has only to carry on by his *life*, and for *friends*, that from which even death's terrors and sinners' enmity could not withhold him. "If, when we were *enemies*, we were reconciled to God *by the death* of his Son, *much more, being reconciled*, we shall *be saved by his life*." Love, surely, cannot fail then, when all the difficulty of its redeeming work is overcome. May the Lord increase our joy of faith in this ever-living intercessor ! Try, my Christian brethren, to let no day pass without realizing views of Jesus as "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." Love brought him down from heaven ; and it was the very same love that carried him thither again, "there to appear in the presence of God for us." "I go," he says, "to prepare a place for you." So he promises again, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever." Observe how all his employment is for his people ; he *appears* before God *for them* ; he *goes to prepare for them* ; he *goes to pray for them*. Hence, when the Comforter first descended on the church, on the day of Pentecost, Peter spake of the gift in these terms : "Therefore, being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, *he hath shed forth this* which ye now see and hear." (Acts ii. 33.) This was the first effect of his heavenly intercession ; and in this gift, it may be remarked, he fulfilled that other office which he sustains, as the great Prophet or teacher of his church. The same we may say of every spiritual

blessing of the covenant which believers this day enjoy ; it is to the life, the intercession of Jesus, their ever-living advocate, that they owe them all.

It is a fatal mistake of sinners, that they treat not with God respecting their souls on this ground. They know not the value of Christ's sacrifice, and still less the necessity of his intercession to render that sacrifice effectual. They think to make peace with God on other terms, and in another way. But it is impossible. The apostle (Heb. x. 19—23) rests all our liberty of access to a throne of grace, all encouragement to constancy in our holy profession, on these two—the blood-shedding and priestly intercession of Christ. “ Having, therefore, boldness to enter into the holiest (*mark how*) by the blood of Jesus, . . . and having an high priest over the house of God, (*here is his intercession,*) let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering.”

And if the *office* of Jesus, as priest and intercessor so also the *personal character* of him who bears it affords rich encouragement to the tempted and fainting soul. The apostle draws it in two expressive terms, (Heb. ii. 17,) where he calls him “ a *merciful* and *faithful* high priest, in things pertaining to God.”

He is *merciful* : one that “ can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way ;” and O, where is there one that has ever been brought into the way, that will not confess this ? He is “ touched with the feeling of our infirmities,” the mani-

fold, the shameful infirmities of his people. Though he was without sin himself, yet the circumstances under which he took our nature exposed him to all the sharpness of temptation, all the bitterness of the keenest sorrow. "He suffered being tempted." Hence he can sympathize with the distresses of his brethren. He was "made like unto them in all things," for this very purpose. Here again is abundant encouragement in drawing near to God through him. "For we have not an high priest who cannot be touched with a feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us *therefore* come *boldly* to a throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need." (Heb. iv. 15, 16.) The cry of them that are ready to perish finds swift entrance into his ear. So the psalmist foretells of him, (Ps. lxxii. 12,) "He shall deliver the needy when he crieth, the poor also, and him that hath no helper."

And as he is a merciful, so he is also a *faithful* high priest. Like Aaron, he bears the names of all his people upon his heart, in the holy place. (Exod. xxviii. 29.) He remembers all the word upon which he has encouraged them to trust: is "ever mindful of his covenant;" (Ps. cxi. 5;) fulfilling all the wonderful relations which he bears to them, and dealing with each of them in exact accordance with its gracious provisions. Many things may seem strange for a time, yea, contrary to the promise; but there is not an individual of his people but shall confess in the end, "Not one good thing hath failed me, of all that the Lord hath spoken." "All the paths of the Lord are mercy."

and truth unto such as keep his covenant and his testimonies.” “All the promises of God in him are yea, and in him amen, to the glory of God by us.”

How do thoughts like these, when they are brought in upon the soul by the power of the Holy Ghost, come as balm into our wounds! The very recollection is refreshing, and he who sends the recollection fulfils the grace. In his love and in his pity he redeems us; he enables the believer to sing in the days of trial, and rejoice in tribulation. So you may hear one of them triumphing, (2 Cor. vii. 4,) “I am *filled* with comfort, I am *exceeding joyful* in all my tribulation:” observe, *exceeding joyful in it all!*

We can scarcely do more than allude to,

2. *His mediatorial dominion*: though it is a subject equally full of delight and consolation to the souls that are interested in him. The man Christ Jesus, the Saviour who loved us unto death, holds the reins of universal empire. Heaven, earth, and hell—all things in all worlds—obey his sovereign will. “The Father hath given *all things* into his hand;” (John xii. 3;) hath “set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put *all things* under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things *for the church*, which is his body, the fulness of him that *filleth all in all.*” (Eph. i. 20—23.) “God,” says the same apostle, (Phil. ii. 9—11,) “hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and

things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Let sinners hear and tremble. He whom they despise as a Saviour is also a king, yea, "King of kings, and Lord of lords." "Yet," saith God, (Ps. ii. 6,) in spite of the hatred and opposition of all his foes, "yet have I set my King upon my holy hill of Zion." There he is exalted to "break" his enemies "with a rod of iron;" to "dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." O bow ye to the sceptre of his grace, ere mercy abused issue in deadliest wrath. Now he is exalted to save; exalted, a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins. "Kiss the Son lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little; blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

This blessedness, my Christian brethren, is yours. This exalted Jesus is *your* Jesus; having universal dominion, and using that dominion, as Mediator of the new covenant, to bring about the everlasting counsels of his love in your deliverance from sin, and death, and hell. Here is the security of the covenant. Corruption is mighty; enemies are mighty; but he who loveth you, he who reigns for you, is mightier. When he ascended on high, he "led captivity captive," and laughed to scorn the enemies of his people. He is now baffling, and will baffle, all their projects; he "gives strength and power unto his people" in their present conflicts, and will bring glory to himself and them, in making them at last "more than conquerors" over all.

Thus we have taken a feeble view of that "chief among ten thousand, the altogether lovely" Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant: Him to whom we are indebted for all its grace: the gift of the Father's love; and so emphatically called, (Isa. xlii. 6; xlix. 8,) "a covenant of the people," as embodying in his own person all its blessings. He is its Mediator:—its surety by eternal engagement; its messenger by his incarnation; its ratifier by his death; and the communicator of all its benefits by his intercession.

To this Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant, ye are come. "See that ye refuse not him that speaketh." Build all your hopes on his sacrifice; draw nigh to God only through his mediation; submit yourselves to his authority; and live as willing subjects of his blessed kingdom. The day is at hand, when he who is now gone within the veil to present his sacrifice for you, will come forth again, like the high priest of old, and crown his waiting people with his everlasting blessing. Happy are all they who are found thus waiting for him; "looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of Jesus Christ, the great God and our Saviour!"

PART III.

MERCY TO UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.

HEBREWS viii. 12.—“*For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.*”

THE general outline of the Christian covenant, in its free, full, sure, and everlasting grace, we have already considered ; and, along with this, the administration of it, in the hands of Christ, as Mediator between God and man. We have seen that it owes its gracious *character* to his *engagements* entered into from eternity ; its *establishment* with man to his sacrifice, the blood of which ratified it ; and its perpetual *efficacy* in the experience of elect sinners to his all-prevailing *intercession*. By the terms of this covenant alone can we ever hope for pardon and acceptance with God. For these terms we are indebted wholly to the work of the Lord Jesus Christ. On the ground of that work must we come to God, and treat with him for a *personal* interest in every blessing which the covenant of grace contains. It is true, as we have said before, that it is the Holy Spirit who ministers this grace, *immediately*, in the hearts of God's people ; but he does this as the “Spirit of Christ,” the promise of the Father to the Son, the gift which

Christ received for man. (Acts ii. 33.) It has pleased that Holy One, in the accomplishment of the work of redemption, thus to subordinate himself to the Son, the minister and mediator of the better covenant; to go forth as *his* Spirit, quickening whom *he* will, there being, at the same time, a perfect agreement of counsel as to those who shall be the heirs of salvation, between the persons of the blessed Trinity.

We are now prepared to examine more in detail the several *parts* of this wonderful mystery of grace, the provisions of which have already passed, in a general manner, under review. The words of my text contain the main provision of the whole: *the foundation-stone upon which all the blessings of the covenant rest.* This is, unconditional mercy to sinners, and everlasting oblivion of all possible offences. "FOR," (God says, as a *reason* for all the *other* blessings pledged to man in this covenant of grace,)—"For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."

May the Spirit of truth, brethren, vouchsafe to lead us into a saving apprehension of the exceeding riches of this forgiving grace! There are, in these words, three things to engage our attention.

- I. The persons to whom this grace is covenanted.
- II. The condition in which it supposes them to be.
- III. God's engagements relative to this condition.

I. We are to consider the persons to whom this grace is covenanted. Who are they who may lay hold on this promise, and rejoice in God as pledged thus to deal *with them*? Unless this be clearly ascertained,

to the entire satisfaction of the mind of any, the largest revelation of grace and mercy will be wholly unavailing. *Is it I*, will each of us inquire, whom God means to include in a promise so cheering, so all-sufficient?

Now, while it is undeniable that there is an elect people, to whom, according to the foreknowledge of God, these promises *especially* belong, and who alone will ever cordially embrace them, and be finally benefited by them,—yet it is important, even for their sakes, who are as yet, many of them, in an unregenerate state, mixed up with a world which lieth in wickedness, and nothing distinguished from the general mass, except in the purpose of God, secret to them as well as others, I say, *for their sakes* it is important to observe, that these promises of the covenant are *general* promises: they are not *so* limited to the elect of God, as that I must pause, and settle whether I be one of them, before I can appropriate the blessing. But they belong to the professing church at large; they are *their* portion and inheritance, *as a church and people called by God's name*, who are therefore dealt with by him as in covenant. If they will *lay hold* on it, and embrace it *spiritually*, as well as outwardly—in a word, if they will go to God upon the ground of it, through Christ the Mediator, *they may*. “The Spirit and the bride say, Come; and *let him that heareth say, Come; and let him that is athirst come; and whosoever will*, let him come, and take of the waters of life freely.” (Rev. xxii. 17.) Nothing can be more plain and unequivocal than the offer of *covenant blessings* which is made to *ungodly* men, and pressed upon

them by Christ, addressing them in his character of Wisdom, (Prov. i. 22, 23.) And the following verses show, that they were such as, notwithstanding all the gracious invitations of Christ, would yet *continue* ungodly. What saith he to them? "How long, ye *simple* ones, will ye love simplicity? and the *scorners* delight in their scorning? and *fools* hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof. Behold, I WILL POUR OUT MY SPIRIT UNTO YOU: I will make known my words unto you." If, then, men perish under the gospel, this is the condemnation, not that the provisions of the covenant did not *apply* to them, nor were meant for them; no, but because they *would not* come to God upon the ground of it, that they might have life." (John v. 40.) Because they *rejected* this grace, and *loved* death. (Prov. viii. 36.)

That the covenant of grace is to be understood thus largely, as the property of the *whole professing church*, so that of them, "*whosoever will*" may share its blessings, is evident from what the apostle says as to the privileges which belonged to the ancient church, even to the members of it who continued carnal rejecters of the Messiah. Turn to the ninth of Romans: he is speaking there of his kinsmen according to the flesh, for whom, as the obstinate enemies of Christ, he had "great heaviness, and continual sorrow in his heart." "Who," he says, "are Israelites,"—and now observe what belonged to them *as such*;—"to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and *the covenants*, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, *and the promises*." All these *pertained* to them; these were *their* privileges, (had they only known how to

improve them,) simply in virtue of their connexion with the ancient church of God. And so it is still, the blessings of the covenant of grace are, as respects outward dispensation to the church, the birthright of *all* who are brought by baptism within its pale; and they are awfully answerable for their non-improvement of these blessings.

False and true professors are, like Esau and Jacob, twins, as it were, of the same womb, the visible church. Esau had the birthright by Providence, as the first-born; Jacob was alone destined for it by grace. It was his; and so the blessings of the covenant are the sole inheritance of the elect of God, as respects their final enjoyment. Yet was not the birthright *so* Jacob's, but that Esau had it to reject. He *did* reject it, agreeably to, but not through constraint of, the divine purpose. In the same manner, worldly professors have an interest in the covenant which they reject: the counsel of God is fulfilled in their rejection of it, but they are, as I have said, awfully answerable for their non-improvement of the blessing.

Witness the dreadful judgments which have fallen on the Jewish church, from the days of Messiah unto this day. Why are these? Because they rejected, as a church and people, that very covenant of grace, Messiah's covenant, which we are now considering. You will observe, that this covenant of grace was *first* offered *to them* as God's people. "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, (Jer. xxxi. 31—33,) when I will make a new covenant *with the house of Israel*, and *with the house of Judah* This shall be the covenant that I will make *with the house of Israel*

after those days, saith the Lord.” This “new covenant” is, as the apostle tells us in the sixth verse of this chapter, that *of which Christ is the mediator*. The days spoken of are therefore, of necessity, *gospel days*, and the covenant, the gospel covenant. This the Jews so obstinately refused, that Christ, who brought it to them, declared, “The kingdom of heaven,” (which is here another word for the gospel,) “shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof.” (Matt. xxi. 43.) But the covenant was *first* proposed to them ; and it was only *after* it had been obstinately rejected by them that it was proposed to the Gentiles. (Mark carefully the following passages. Matt. x. 5, 6. Luke xxiv. 47. Acts xiii. 46.) “*Through their fall* salvation is come unto the Gentiles.” (Rom. xi 11, 30.) According, then, to our Lord’s denunciation, the covenant is *now* made with the Gentiles ; and the elect of God from among them are the true spiritual Israel, who reap the abundant blessings of it ; as the apostle instructs the Galatians, “If ye be Christ’s, then are ye *Abraham’s seed*, and heirs according to the promise.” And all the churches of the Gentiles, as professing churches of Christ, are, by the mercy of God, interested in this covenant, so that there is *no individual member of them who may not sue out the mercy it contains* ; nay, not only *may* do so, but it is to his eternal perdition if he do it not.

I cannot but notice here, though it be foreign to our immediate purpose, that this covenant remains yet to be established with the *literal* Israel and Judah. The connexion of the passage in which it is announced with

the context, (Jer. xxxi.) puts this beyond all reasonable doubt. The Lord will ere long return to his ancient people in mercies; he "will build up the tabernacle of Judah which is broken down," and the "receiving of them" shall be to the whole world "life from the dead." (Rom. xi. 15.) This mystery of the rejection of the covenant by the Jews, and of its subsequent establishment with them as a national covenant, seems, to me, to be intimated, after the manner of prophecy, in this very passage, by the double form of expression, "*the days*," (ver. 8,) and "*after those days*;" (ver. 10;) *both* these periods being named as the time of making the covenant with that people.

But the point with which we are now concerned is the application of these covenant promises to ourselves. Whose are they? Who may look upon God as thus dealing with them? as thus saying of them, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more?" And I answer that it is clear, especially from what the apostle says of the Jewish church, that these promises are the *common property* of the whole body of the *professing* people of God. These are the terms on which God pledges himself to deal *with them*. As a Christian, then, outwardly connected by baptism with his church, I am accounted of God as acquiescing in this covenant: I have, as it were, subscribed it; and unless, after all, I be found cleaving to a covenant of works, looking to a righteousness of my own for salvation, I may come to God with the assurance that this is the blessed rule which, in all his conduct towards me, he will observe. This is very necessary to be

kept in mind, in order to preserve hope alive in the breast of an awakened sinner; and at the same time to silence the folly of those who would make God's secret purpose, and choice of a peculiar people, an argument for neglecting the *general* offers of salvation. The sovereignty of God, in disposing the souls of men (as he only can do) to *accept* the terms of this covenant, is a subject upon which we are not now called to enter. It is enough for us to know, what the consciences of all feel to be truth, that, if men reject the gospel, they are their own *wilful* destroyers: the fault lies with themselves; they will not come to Christ for salvation. On the other hand, if there be any individual who *is* disposed to go to God on the terms of this covenant, he need not wait to inquire whether he be an object of God's electing love, which he can never know but by the fruit of it, even obedience through sanctification of the Spirit; (1 Pet. i. 2.) If he *will* go to God, he *may*. "Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out." "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more."

Such are the persons to whom this grace is covenanted. Let us consider,

II. The condition in which it supposes them to be.

Throughout this covenant no mention is made of any thing in man but guilt and ruin. The sole reason which God *assigns* for making it, is, the people's sin in breaking the former; (ver. 9;) to convince us, if possible, that nothing whatever, on our part, moved him thereto, but our helpless, hopeless wretchedness.

The promise in my text obviously *assumes* such to be his condition.

Man is in himself all unrighteousness, as it is written, "there is none righteous, no, not one." He has no *principle* of good within him; (Rom. vii. 18;) and in this respect that word is verified, "There is *no difference*; for *all* have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." (Rom. iii. 22, 23.) All the *actions*, moreover, of men in their unregenerate state, even the best and most innocent in themselves, are, in the sight of God, full of evil. "The *plowing* of the wicked is *sin*." (Prov. xxi. 4.) "Works," saith our thirteenth Article, "done before the grace of Christ and the inspiration of his Spirit, are not pleasant to God; . . . yea, rather, for that they are not done as God hath willed and commanded them to be done, we doubt not but they have the nature of sin."

Such is the state in which the gospel finds man: it recognises in him, "unrighteousness, sins, iniquities," from the guilt of which he can do nothing whatever to deliver himself. "By thy sins," it saith, "thou hast destroyed thyself; but *in me* is thy help." (Hos. xiii. 9.) Every man who would be saved must confess this to be the truth of his condition—must own himself "undone," and "stand guilty before God." In this posture, and in this only, God will treat with him of mercy.

Now here is a truth deeply wounding and offensive to the pride of man. He toils to bring some good thing that shall make him *worthy* of God's favour; and this is the spring of all the heartless service, the task-religion, the spurious zeal for good works, which may be

found in natural men. These have their root, not in a love of holiness, but in a desire to bring *a price for life* ; to prove the existence of some native goodness, and so refute the odious charge of depravity and moral ruin. Hence the efforts of men to lower the standard of holiness to what they conceive to be within their power of attainment. Hence the pains men are at to hide themselves from themselves, and make the best of their state before God ; like the merchant who, suspecting his affairs, is afraid to look fully into them, lest he at once detect his total ruin. So men hide from themselves and others the extent of their guilt ; toil, with secret disgust, to patch up a righteousness of their own ; “all” of which is as “filthy rags,” (Isa. lxi. 6,) but in which they vainly flatter themselves they may find acceptance. And to strip them of this, and show them its worthlessness, is as if you would rob them of all hope of life.

O thou poor bankrupt sinner, may the Spirit of God, who alone can convince of sin, show thee to thyself ! Whatever be thy vain conceit of goodness, sin is all that God beholds in thee : and in this he especially commendeth his love toward sinners, that he provided salvation for them *as such*. See his reiterated assertion of this truth, “When we were yet *without strength*, in due time Christ died *for the ungodly*.” “While we were yet *sinner*s, Christ died for us.” “When we were *enemies*, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.”

If this be an humiliating truth, it is a very cheering one to every convinced, burdened sinner. The promise of my text contemplates in him all that evil, to

the reality and enormity of which he has just begun to open his eyes; the apprehension of which makes him afraid of God, and causes him to despair of any thing but judgment at his hand. All that is mentioned in the subject of this covenant-grace is sin : and every term is used in succession, “unrighteousness, sins, iniquities,” whereby may be expressed the *abounding* and *variety* of those evils over which “grace doth much more abound,” *ὑπερπερίσσευσεν ἡ χάρις*. (Rom. iv. 21.) Surely there is nothing more suited to inspire hope and confidence in the breast of an awakened sinner, than the consideration of this truth. My sins, such a one may say, are indeed exceeding great ; but, thanks be to God, he who best knows them speaks to me of mercy ! My sins of youth and of riper age are before him : my “secret sins in the light of his countenance.” Their aggravations, their consequences—the evil which they have occasioned, the good which they have prevented—are fully comprehended by him alone. If I would know their magnitude, I must go to *his* word to learn it ; if I would confess and set them forth in their true colours, I must go to the same word for language to describe them : my whole heart, with all its hidden depths of unsuspected depravity, is fathomed by God, who bids me come to him for pardon. Why, then, hide these sins, any longer, from myself ? Why seek to palliate them, or screen them from his searching eye ? Let me rather go, as David does, simply on the ground of the divine character, and cry, “For thy name’s sake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity, *for it is great.*”

But it is long, in general, before an awakened sin

ner, though again and again God discover to him the vanity of all attempts to bring any deservings of his own, can be persuaded to go quite without hope or plea of any kind but this,—Lord, I am a sinner, and thou art a free Saviour. We dare not believe that grace is indeed so free, so unbounded, to those who will go to God in Christ. But when once the man is brought to know that he may go *as he is*—naked for dress, diseased for health, perishing for life and salvation, destitute of any good thing,—and that he may receive all freely of God, who has invited him to come in this character, (Rev. iii. 17, 18,) and covenanted to bestow all—then peace, and every blessing of the gospel, is not far off. The soul comes to God in God's own way, and he will meet it, and “abundantly pardon.”

To bring us to this blessed state of mind, God often prefaces his most remarkable promises of mercy with such a fearful and appalling array of the guilt of those for whom he designs it, that we might rather expect it to be preparatory to the most awful denunciations of his righteous vengeance. Take, for instance, Isa. i. 18, as connected with the preceding context; or one yet more to the purpose, (Isa. xliii. 22—25:) “Thou hast not called upon me, O Jacob, thou hast been weary of me, O Israel: thou hast not brought me the small cattle of thy burnt-offerings, neither hast thou honoured me with thy sacrifices; I have not caused thee to serve with an offering, nor wearied thee with incense. Thou hast bought me no sweet cane with money, neither hast thou filled me with the fat of thy sacrifices: but *thou hast made me to serve with thy sins, thou hast*

wearied me with thine iniquities." What is the judgment which follows upon such a fearful charge? "I, even I, am he that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins." God sets the two in contrast, on purpose to mark what is the state of the sinner, what he sees in him, when he bestows his blessings. I do not quote this passage to illustrate the *mercy* of God, which we are presently to consider, but to show that the exercise of this mercy is in full contemplation of all that, in the sinner, which might lead him to look for the immediate and most terrible infliction of Divine vengeance. God, to remove every fear from the soul, (and there is nothing so *suspicious* of reconciliation as the conscience of one who has offended,) draws, as it were, a faithful picture of the sinner, in all his deformity, with an accurateness which surprises the man himself, and convinces him that God knows all his guilt better than he knows it himself: and then under it he writes, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord; though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." He first depicts them as they are, and then adds this after them all, "I, even I, am he that *blotteth out* thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins!"

We may notice yet another very gracious method which God takes, to convince men that sin and unrighteousness is that alone which he supposes in all those to whom the offers of his mercy come. This is, when, *in the very terms* of his promises, is included the clearest display of wretchedness and ruin in the

objects of them. Thus God promises, (Ezek. xxxvi. 26, 27,) "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh. I will also save you from all your uncleannesses." Now what is here, but mercy on the one hand, to utter undeserving and wretchedness on the other? They to whom these promises are addressed are described in them as *unclean* and *filthy*. Their hearts are evil, yea, hearts *of stone*, that will not, cannot break nor melt; and the promise has evidently no application, is of no value, except to those who are in this condition. Do I address, then, any who feel this to be a true description of themselves? and who, under a sense of their sins, despair of obtaining mercy? O, beloved brethren, if God have only given you a painful *sense* of these evils, thank him for it: go and turn this very wretchedness into a plea with him. Lord, I am indeed unrighteous: my sins and iniquities are exceeding great; my heart is a heart of stone; yea, there is "in me no good thing;" and I know that of myself I can never do any thing to render myself acceptable to thee. But thou hast singled out this very condition, and engaged to bestow grace and succour suitable to it. O then, *because I am thus*, I come unto thee; fulfil, Lord, thine own word; take away this heart of stone, and give me a heart of flesh. "Be merciful to my unrighteousness, and my sins and iniquities remember no more." Happy they among us, who have learned thus to pray! Let us consider,

III. God's engagements relative to this condition.

“I will be merciful . . . I will remember no more.” In these words God promises the removal of all kinds and degrees of sin, (1) freely, (2) eternally.

(1.) *Freely*. “I will be merciful.” This is both the *reason* with God for blessing, and the *method* by which he works upon the souls of his people; winning them from their natural enmity and distrust of himself, by the effectual revelation of his mercy to them. The words, as they stand in Jer. xxxi., from whom the apostle quotes them, are “I will forgive.” But the term here adopted as equivalent carries us a step further; points out the *source* of God’s forgiveness—what it is that moves him in the bestowal of this inestimable blessing.

This is mercy—free and sovereign mercy to sinners, contemplated as such. This was, from eternity, the good pleasure of his will. Into this sovereignty must all mercy towards man be resolved. There was no motive, no reason for it, but God’s own infinite delight in the exercise of it to creatures deservedly perishing without it. When God looked upon man, and foresaw his self-caused ruin, his desperate rebellion, his total loss of all that could make him pleasant in his sight, and the presence of all that was odious and loathsome to the eyes of his purity; then, in spontaneous love and pity of the Godhead, was conceived the thought and purpose of mercy towards him: then God set his heart upon him to deliver him. “I said unto thee, *when thou wast in thy blood, Live.*” (Ezek. xvi. 6.) Infinite love, yearning over his fallen creature, called in the aid of infinite wisdom to devise a plan for his rescue: for reconciling the attributes of holiness,

justice, and immutable truth, with that to which they seemed essentially opposed—the exercise of mercy to the person of the offender.

And when Divine wisdom approved no other plan, for its accomplishment, than the incarnation, and sacrifice in our nature, of the eternal Word, love that passeth knowledge drew not back; “he spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all!” Here, then, let us adore the “exceeding riches of his grace, in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus.” Here the soul of the believer is in its “pleasant places,” when he contemplates salvation in the spring of it,—MERCY TO UNRIGHTEOUSNESS—the everlasting purpose of God, to the sure accomplishment of which all events of time have been made subservient.

It is a signal artifice of the prince of darkness, by which he blackens the character of God, robs him of his glory of sovereign love, and makes him odious to the natural mind, to represent the sufferings of Christ as if they *extorted* forgiveness from God, as from one wholly indisposed in himself to the exercise of it. On the contrary, the Scriptures everywhere speak of Christ as the *gift of the Father*. His coming was but the *manifesting*, the embodying, as it were, of that “kindness and love of God our Saviour towards man,” which then “*appeared*,” (Tit. iii. 4;) not which *began* then, or was *procured* then; no, beloved, but *appeared* then; having originated spontaneously, from everlasting, in the Father’s mind. “From the beginning of the world it was hid in God, but now is *made manifest*.” “In this was *manifested* the love of God towards us, (1 John iv. 9,) because that God sent his only begotten

Son into the world, that we might live through him." Ever remember, then, that the coming of Christ is a fruit and *consequence* of love in God: for it is this discovery of God, as he appears all love in Christ, which alone "slays the enmity," and brings the relenting sinner, in kindest emotions of joy and gratitude, to his feet. Henceforth he has communion with the Father in love, while he realizes him under that sweetest of all his revealed characters, "the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." This is the beginning of all pleasant intercourse of sinful man with God.

Consider, now, this mercy to unrighteousness, as it finds a way of exercise consistent with the divine perfections, in and by Christ.

An unholy sinner and a holy God cannot meet. "Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity." (Hab. i. 13.) Herein lies the great difficulty to be surmounted in the salvation of a sinner. How shall a polluted creature, unable to cleanse himself from sin, come before a holy God, and God *continue* holy, while he accepts him, and shows him favour? In other words, how shall man, without the possibility of his bringing any *personal* righteousness, be *dealt with as righteous* by God? This great difficulty is removed by Christ, the sinner's friend: by his voluntary susception of man's sin to be his own, and so the entire removal of it from the person of the believer in him: further, by the imputation of the merit of Christ's work to the believing soul, to be to it *in the stead of personal righteousness* for acceptance with God. This is that one fundamental doctrine of the gospel which alone can make it "glad tidings" to

guilty men—the doctrine of *the justification of a sinner by the righteousness of Christ, apprehended through faith, and imputed to him as believing.* “We are declared righteous before God, (says our eleventh Article,) only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deserving. Wherefore, that we are justified by faith only is a most wholesome doctrine, and very full of comfort.”

The term, “*to impute,*” or “put to the account of,” λογίζεσθαι, or ἐλλογεῖν, (Rom. v. 13,) is a term borrowed from pecuniary transactions among men ; and, as applied to sin, contemplates it in the light of a *debt*, which is *put, by consent* of all parties, *to the account* of a surety, and is thus *made his own*, and discharged by him for the debtor. This precise use of the term occurs in St. Paul’s epistle to Philemon, ver. 18, wherein, supposing it probable that Onesimus, a fugitive slave, was in debt to his master, he makes the debt his own in these words, “If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee aught, put that to my account.” So the case stands between God and sinners. Christ, in his infinite love to men, *consented* to make their debt his own, and thus it became *truly his*, and was required of him. “The Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.” “Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree.” (Isa. liii. 6. 1 Pet. ii. 24.) And in exactly the same way, the *believing* soul *consents* to accept Christ and his righteousness, which thus becomes its own, and is thenceforth imputed to it as such. Take the following testimonies, from among innumerable other, to this vital truth of Christianity. “God

was in Christ, (2 Cor. v. 19,) reconciling the world unto himself, *not imputing* their *trespasses* unto them." "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man unto whom God *imputeth righteousness without works.*" (Rom. iv. 6.) "He hath made him who knew no sin *to be sin* for us, that *we* might be made *the righteousness of God* in him." (2 Cor. v. 21.) "*He*, of God, is made *unto us* . . . *righteousness* . . ." (1 Cor. i. 30.)

This state of a sinner, wherein God lays no sin to his charge, is called a state of *justification*; which is a term of law, and signifies—the *declaring a person righteous*. It supposes the arraignment of the criminal before God, at the bar of conscience. The case is tried. The charge of sin and desert of wrath is brought home to the soul by the Holy Spirit. The convinced sinner *admits it all*; confesses himself only and wholly ungodly; sets up *no defence* of works done, or to be done; thou art "just," saith he, in "judging, and clear in condemning;" but, Lord, thou hast thyself provided me with an all-sufficient plea—the atonement and righteousness of Christ: thou hast assured me of my personal interest in them, when I take them as meant for me, on the faith of thy own word. Lord, I believe. I plead with thee to do as thou hast said; to deal with me as righteous, seeing I present to thee that perfect righteousness of Christ, which is mine by believing acceptance of him as thy gift to men.

Now this plea God admits. The debt (to look again at sin in this light) is, hereupon, "blotted out." The sinner is declared righteous; and "being justified by

faith," he has "peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

The part which faith has in justification may easily be gathered from the preceding ; but it deserves a more distinct consideration. Faith accepts Christ as what God has declared him to be, and so unites the soul to Christ, whose righteousness thus becomes the believer's, as the name, the rank, the property of the husband belongs to the wife, upon her consent to accept him in that character. To be justified, then, by faith, is to be justified by Christ's righteousness apprehended through faith. So are we to understand those words of the apostle,—"*To him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.*" (Rom. iv. 5.) Not that faith is that meritorious act for the sake of which, *as a work*, God justifies ; for this is directly against the whole scope of the passage, which *opposes* him that worketh to him that believeth ; but as faith *brings to account Christ's righteousness*. Indeed, saving faith is itself the *gift* of God ; and therefore can never *deserve* justification for its own sake. (See John vi. 44. Acts xvi. 14; and xviii. 27. 1 Cor. iii. 5. 1 Pet. i. 21. and 2 Pet. i. 1.) We are "*justified freely, by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*" "When the woman (says Bishop Hopkins) was healed only by touching of Christ's garments, the virtue that healed her proceeded not from her touch, but from him whom she touched : yet our Saviour tells her that *her faith had made her whole*; which can no more be properly understood of her faith, than of her touch ; for

still the healing virtue was from Christ, conveyed to her by her faith, and that faith testified by her touch; so when we say that we are justified by faith, we must understand that faith doth it not by its own virtue, but by virtue of Christ's righteousness, which is conveyed to us by our faith."

These, then, are the three parts which are distinguishable, in the application of "mercy to unrighteousness," through Christ.

1. *The gift of faith*: whereby the penitent sinner is brought to believe God's record of his Son; to receive, and rest in Christ and his righteousness, as the all-sufficient gift of God to men.

2. *The imputation of Christ's righteousness* so embraced. Faith takes it as given of God, in the gift of Christ; and thus it is called, "the gift by grace," "the gift of righteousness." The man has it, to present to God; and God therefore imputes it, because he has it. So vain are the cavils of those who pour contempt upon imputed righteousness, as something unreal and fictitious.

3. *Justification* in virtue of that righteousness. God is "*just* in being the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus;" (Rom. iii. 26;) and that with regard to no other condition of the sinner that comes to him, than that he *does so come*, believing God's record of his Son, and thereby *possessing* that "righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ, unto all and upon all them that believe." (Rom. iii. 22.)

Behold here, then, my beloved brethren, and embrace with adoring gratitude, "Mercy to unrighteousness!" Seek no reason for it in yourselves: the

reasons are all in God and his Christ: God having mercy, because he will have mercy, and opening a way by the work of Christ, in which this mercy may have room for its unlimited exercise. Begin here, for here God begins, if you would have any solid peace and comfort of religion. This free justification of the ungodly through the merits of Christ, made theirs in believing, is the foundation, the sure cornerstone of all covenant blessings. This is the *first thing to be sought*. Am I a justified person? a pardoned sinner, through the sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ? Never will an awakened conscience rest till this point be ascertained. "*Being justified . . . we have peace.*" There can be none without it. And remember, there is no price you can bring in your hand to deserve it. It is a free gift, awaiting your acceptance of it, in humble acknowledgment that you are undone without it. Take God at his word,—“I will be merciful.” His glory is as much concerned as is your happiness, in his being so. In Christ “set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood,” God declares “*his righteousness* for the remission of sins that are past,” through his forbearance. (Rom. iii. 25.) Go to him, then, *as you are*, believing in Jesus; *satisfied* with his atonement and righteousness; and realizing God as satisfied, who, in your exercise of faith, makes the conveyance of them to you. On the belief of this blessed truth will *follow* that further blessing of the covenant, the sanctification of your soul, which you in vain wait for, to recommend you to Christ for salvation; which is *an effect* of this love of God shed abroad in your hearts by the Holy Ghost

"We hold," says an old writer, "that God justifies the ungodly, *neither by making him godly before he justifies him, nor leaving him ungodly after he hath justified him*; but that the same grace that justifies him doth immediately sanctify him."

Observe further, that as God promises, here, the removal of sins *freely*, so also,

2. *Eternally*. "I will remember *no more*." Guilt makes the soul of the sinner fearful: he is ever recurring to the memory of his past sins, and he fears God does the same. He has had some momentary glimpses, some sweet taste of mercy; but when the *present sense* of it is gone, conscience is afraid again; he is ready to suspect God of yet harbouring some latent feeling of resentment; fears the reconciliation has been partial, and that wrath, so deeply deserved, is ready to break out afresh on fresh provocation. But O, blessed be God, this is indeed the way of men; but *his* ways are not our ways, nor his thoughts our thoughts. Those whom he forgives freely, he forgives entirely, forgives eternally: "I will remember *no more*." And hence the apostle (Rom. viii. 30) represents the *beginning* of peace with God, and the *issue* of it in eternal blessedness, as inseparably connected. "Whom he justified, them he also glorified."

No such complete removal of sins was there by the old covenant. They were forgiven, indeed, so as not to bring the curse due to them upon the penitent sinner, but they were not *so* forgiven as to be *forgotten*; so that there should be "*no more conscience of sins*." (Heb. x. 2.) There were appointed *typical* purifications of them, but "there was a *remembrance again*

made of sins *every year*." (Heb. x. 3.) And the reason (as the apostle adds) is clear. "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should *take away* sins." No sufficient sacrifice had yet been offered: and therefore not one sin of men had yet been *blotted out* from the book of God; no, nor forgiven, except in *anticipation* of the great atonement which was to be made in the fulness of time. But the work of Jesus is a *perfect* work, a *finished* work. He was "to *finish* the transgression, and to *make an end* of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness." (Dan. ix. 24.) Clearly, then, sin being put a full end to, as respects all charge of it upon the believer in Jesus, there can be no remembrance of it more; and, conversely, this assurance of God in the new covenant, "I will remember no more," demonstrates, at once, that entire satisfaction for sins has been made by the work of Christ. So the apostle argues, (Heb. x. 14—18,) resting his assertion,— "By one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified,"—on the declaration which we are considering. That this is so, saith he, the Holy Ghost himself witnesses, by the express terms of the new covenant. For, after promising to be the author of sanctification to the heirs of promise, he adds, "And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."

"Now," argues the apostle, "where remission of these is," such a remission as is complete and *final*, "there is no more offering for sin."

May the Spirit of Jesus enable us to realize this great truth: not only the *freeness* of grace in the gospel, but the *completeness* of the work of Christ for the

establishment of perfect peace between us and God. There needs no more offering for sin. Take all the guilt of all who believe, past or present, the laver of Jesus' blood avails to cleanse it away. God is *satisfied* for it. "There is *no condemnation* to them that are in Christ Jesus." "Thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea." (Mic. vii. 19.) The justification of the believer is not an imperfect work, so that he may be justified to-day, and condemned again to-morrow : it varies not with the variations of his feelings: the work on the faith of which justification rests is a *finished* work ; and, therefore, if once recognised as mine, it must eternally clear me from all possible charge. The fluctuations of faith will cause fluctuations in my *enjoyment* of Christ's salvation ; but the salvation itself is unchangeable. Satan may bring a charge of sin, and succeed in fixing it upon the conscience, through my indistinct apprehension of Christ's sufficiency ; but God brings no charge ; and therefore the apostle proclaims that triumphant challenge, "It is *God that justifieth* ; who is he that condemneth?" Therefore, with the impossibility of *condemnation* of the believer, he declares the impossibility of *separation* from "the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord!" (Rom. viii. 38, 39.)

Here, then, let the tempted Christian take his stand, and hold fast this vital truth, when a daily sense of his hated evil, yet warring in his members, oppresses him, and arrays God in terrors. Jesus has *made an end of sin*. When it is brought in penitential acknowledgment to the cross of Christ, that blood, sprinkled upon the conscience, takes it all away. God remembers it

no more. That word, "I will be merciful, I will remember no more," is not true only of sins committed in an unregenerate condition. The God who remembered his covenant, and forbore to destroy in the daily provocations of that state of darkness, *much more* remembers the word of his grace, much more bears with the sinful infirmities of his children, now that sin is *hated*, that it is the grief and plague of the renewed mind. Hesitate not then, beloved in Christ, to trust in his work, as *by itself* fully and eternally covering all trespasses. "He hath *perfected for ever* them that are sanctified"—first sanctified by the blood of Christ, (Heb. x. 10, and xiii. 12,) and then sanctified by the Spirit of Christ, according to the promise of the covenant. Thus justification and sanctification are inseparable ; and the doctrine of free grace and completed salvation, rightly understood, is seen and felt to be a "truth which is after godliness;" powerfully productive (and the only thing that is so) of holiness both in heart and life.

Two brief observations must close this important subject.

1. The blessings of the covenant are *unconditional*. All rest on mercy to unrighteousness: contemplate man as helpless: come down to him in his ruin, to convince him of it; and then freely and mightily rescue him out of it. It is true, men can enjoy none of the blessings of the covenant but in the exercise of "repentance towards God, and faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ." It is true, that "without holiness no man shall see the Lord." These dispositions are the only channels in which the grace of God can flow to men; and in the

Scriptures they are everywhere exhorted, as reasonable and accountable beings, to exercise them. But it is equally true, that sovereign and distinguishing mercy is the only effectual spring of them in any soul. Repentance is the gift of Christ. (Acts v. 31.) Faith is the gift of Christ. (*See above, page 99.*) Holiness, in the *principle* of it, is *created* in the believer *by God*, who has elected him thereto. (Eph. ii. 10. 1 Pet. i. 2.) These are all blessings of the new covenant, communicated to the people of God *antecedent* to all disposition in them to fulfil its duties. The precept, "Make you a new heart," neither makes void, nor is itself nullified by the grace of the promise, "A new heart will *I give* you." The command sets the man upon "working out his own salvation with fear and trembling;" and the grace of God, meeting the poor dark sinner, whom it has secretly moved to inquire after salvation in obedience to the outward admonition, reveals, and effectually applies that salvation to the soul. But the discovery of need, the provision in Christ for that need, the spirit in the exercise of which the supply is ministered—all is of grace. They are "things that are *χαρισθέντα*, *freely given* to us of God." "It is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy."

2. Mercy to unrighteousness is strictly a *covenant* blessing. The consideration of this attribute of God is one which, above all other, encourages the world to *continue* in sin. They are well pleased to hear the declaration, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness;" and so, in the desperate wickedness of their hearts, they abound in sins, because God abounds in

pardons! We need not fear, say men. This is God's rule towards us frail creatures, and therefore our departures from his perfect standard will easily find forgiveness: or, if this be not so, to what does the declaration of mercy amount? Thus, while God in his word labours to show how he can be just in *pardon*ing, sinners are altogether at a loss to conceive how he can be just in *punish*ing. Now know, my brethren, this mercy, immeasurable as it is, is all treasured up for sinners *in Christ alone*. His blood bought it: he is the mediator of the new covenant to minister it: *and not one thought of mercy* has God to any soul, who comes not through Christ for its enjoyment. "He that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the *wrath* of God *abideth* on him." "God is *angry* with the wicked every day."

Some, indeed, will tell us that *all* men are pardoned alike, penitent or impenitent; and that they perish, not because they will not seek pardon in Christ, but because they will not believe they *are* pardoned, antecedent to all belief. A vain and hurtful fancy: separating the grace of forgiveness from him in whom alone it dwells; "*in whom* we have redemption through his blood, *the forgiveness of sins*."

As well might it be said that the bitten Israelites (Num. xxi. 6) were healed by the mere *erection* of the brazen serpent, and prior to any *looking* thereto; and that such as died, perished, not because they were not healed, but because they would not believe that they were so. The healing virtue is in Christ; and only then becomes *actually* ours, when we look unto him (Isa. xlv. 22) as God's appointed mode of its con-

veyance to us. Peace, life, and every spiritual blessing, is treasured up *in him*, and is inseparable, by the very terms of the covenant, from pardon. This very promise, "I will remember no more," shows that the sins of those who are *not* interested in the covenant are ever fresh in God's remembrance; "Our secret sins in the light of thy countenance."

O then, if you would have mercy, seek it in God's appointed way: lay to heart your many and aggravated transgressions: think of the "treasures of wrath" which you are daily heaping up, by sin, "against the day of wrath," and which you must presently inherit for ever. Turn to him who saves men, not *in* their sins, but *from* them. "Let the wicked *forsake his way*, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord:" in this way only, but in this way surely, "he will have mercy on him, . . . he will abundantly pardon."

PART IV.

DIVINE RENEWAL.

HEBREWS viii 10.—“*For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their minds, and write them in their hearts.*”

WE have, here, the promise of that first blessing of the gospel covenant with which God beatifies the soul of a pardoned sinner. The foundation of this and of all other covenant blessings we considered in the preceding discourse, being absolutely free grace and mercy pledged to sinners, regarded simply in that character, that they *are* sinners. (ver. 12.)

These exceeding riches of forgiving grace have been obtained for us by the precious blood of Christ; so that it is a *righteous thing* with God to be a Saviour, irrespective of any thing but the work of Christ, laid hold of by a penitent sinner for salvation, in the faith of God's own word. The person so believing in Jesus is thereupon dealt with as *a justified person*: God has covenanted, in respect of all such, “I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.” The whole grace of the covenant is summed up herein: all the other blessings of it rest upon this basis; so that none

have any reason to expect them who come not to God on this ground; and on the other hand, none have any reason to *hesitate* as to their certain enjoyment, who thankfully accept the work of Christ, their Surety, in the stead of all other righteousness whatsoever, as their plea for the communication of them. With respect to every one of these promised blessings,—whether of divine renewal, as in my text, or divine relationship, or divine enlightening, which remain yet to be considered, God has said, I will do it for them, “*For I will be merciful*” to them. In other words, I will sanctify and bless them, for I will freely justify them.

We observed, hereupon, that it is very important to begin in this matter where God begins; to know that the justification of a sinner, in the sight of God, is wholly independent of personal holiness, as the *pro-curing cause* of it; whereas, our proud and ignorant hearts are ever ready to conclude that there can be no acceptance for us with God, except through something pleasant to him seen *in us*. This is entirely to invert God’s order. He first “justifies the *ungodly*,” (Rom. iv. 5,) that he may sanctify; and thus, as we have said, justification, or that state of a sinner wherein God lays no sin to his charge, though it be so intimately *connected* with holiness, that the one cannot be without the other, (for those whom God promises to justify he covenants also to sanctify,) is yet wholly *independent* of it: the one is not the *cause* of the other: the finished work of Jesus, without holiness of any kind in the sinner, gives him perfect reconciliation and peace with God, when, in a sense of his own ruin, he goes to God and pleads it for acceptance.

It follows hence, also, that justification is a blessing in the *present* possession of every simple believer in Jesus. It is something which he *has now*, and may rejoice in now, as his, while by faith he appropriates the work of Christ, as *of itself* entitling him thereto.

Many who ought to have a better understanding in the mystery of Christ, regard acceptance with God as that of which they cannot be sure, until they finish their course, and get beyond the dangers of this scene of trial. This is to confound two things which we cannot be too careful to distinguish—our justification, and our sanctification: it makes the former to rest upon the latter: it supposes reasons of God's favour to a sinner distinct from the work of Christ. Complete justification is perfectly consistent with incomplete sanctification. The one rests on the simple acceptance of Christ's work, *finished* and accepted of God *for us*: the other is a *gradual* work of the Spirit of Christ *in us*; sure indeed in its issue, but vehemently opposed by the devil and corrupt nature; and the sensible measure of it perpetually varying, in the daily conflict of the believer, while he is in the body. But these variations are no more an evidence that we are not justified, than want of maturity in a child is an evidence that he has not life.

It is the great secret of the believer's peace, the only thing which can preserve his soul in peace, in his present warfare, to know that his acceptance with God is not to be measured by his own sensible experience, his spiritual comfort or dejection, according as he apprehends the work of holiness to be advancing, or at a stand within him. Be this, to his apprehension, as it

may, the established Christian knows, and blesses God, that he has something *quite distinct* from his own experience, something that is *incapable of change*, wherein to glory. As a believer, being justified through the faith of Christ, he is always "accepted in the beloved." The firm persuasion of this soul-supporting truth forms his great encouragement to persevere in his pursuit of holiness, under all difficulties. If he be cast down in the deadly strife against corruption, in this strength of the Lord he is enabled to get up again. It is his privilege to know that sin is *not imputed* to him: "There is *no condemnation* to them that are in Christ Jesus,"—a truth of which the believer, in his present condition, often needs the comfortable assurance.

Now, bearing these important considerations in mind as to the *true place of holiness* in the gospel scheme, let us examine the promise of sanctification, here made, to those on whose unrighteousness God has mercy, and whose sins and iniquities he remembers no more. "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts." This is the order of grace in the gospel covenant. It meets man in his unrighteousness, and gives him, in the tender mercies of God in Christ, a free and full discharge from it for ever. And because "without holiness no man shall see the Lord," it further pledges to the soul, thus discharged from guilt, what every soul, so delivered, will most ardently desire, the effectual establishment of a divine principle of holiness within—the *fruit*, not the *cause*, of mercy. Certainly God never blesses any but in the way of holiness, however it be true that holiness is not the

price of blessing. Rather, it is the great end which God proposes, in showing mercy to a sinner—to make him eternally *happy, by making him holy*; and a sure foundation of holiness is laid in free forgiveness. He who is interested in the one promise shall doubtless experience the fulfilment of the other : and hence we may at once perceive how St. Paul's declaration, that "a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the law," is in perfect agreement with a seeming *contrary* declaration of St. James, that "faith without works is dead ;" and again, "by works is faith made perfect," for the same mercy that freely forgives ungodliness, engages also to deliver from the love and power of it ; teaches men to deny it, and "to live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world." The Lord grant to us, beloved, who profess saving faith in Jesus, to experience the truth of this grace also, here connected with it in covenant.

Learn, from the words under review, the following particulars :—

I. The *character* of sanctification.

II. The *seat* of it.

III. The *author* of it.

I. The *proper character* of sanctification. This, as it is an act of God upon the human soul, consists in the establishment in it of a divine principle of holiness, expressed, here, as the putting God's laws into the mind, and writing them in the heart. This is begun in *regeneration*, the nature of which will further appear, as we proceed. It is described in Scripture under various striking similitudes, all illustrating the

vastness of that change which is experienced by the happy subjects of it. Thus it is described as—a being born of God, (John i. 13, and 1 John iii. 9, and v. 4;) a new creation (2 Cor. v. 17) after God's own image, (Eph. iv. 24. Col. iii. 10;) a passing from death unto life, (1 John iii. 14. Eph. ii. 5. Col. ii. 13;) a calling out of darkness into God's marvellous light. (1 Pet. ii. 9.)

This is that great moral change which must be wrought in every man who would see the kingdom of God. He who makes the assertion subjoins the reason—"That which is born of the flesh is flesh:" a term used in Scripture to express the total absence of any thing spiritual or holy, in fallen man. To this awful truth God has borne the most full and unequivocal testimony. in every part of his word. "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth; and that *every imagination* of the thoughts of his heart was *only evil continually*." (Gen. vi. 5.) And lest this might seem a character peculiar to those who were destroyed, for their wickedness, by the waters of the flood, it is remarkable that God *immediately repeats* his testimony, at a time when there existed no individuals of the human race but Noah and his family, who had been exempted for their piety from the common destruction. "I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake," (Gen. viii. 21,) "*for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth*." This, then, at least, stands an unexceptionable testimony to the utter depravity of man, *as man*, independent of any peculiarities of age, or country, or condition. With this agree the confessions of the holiest men, as to their

native vileness in God's sight. Job, (xl. 4, and xlii. 6;) David, (Ps. li. 5;) Isaiah, in the very act of receiving his prophetic commission. (Isa. vi. 5.) Listen again to God's testimony, (Jer. xvii. 9;) "The heart," (not of any particular individuals, but generally, in all men,) "the heart is deceitful *above all things*, and desperately wicked:" (*incurably* wicked. Compare Jer. xv. 18.) "*Who can know it?*" Or, lastly, take our Lord's confirmation of all that had gone before to the same purpose, (Mark vii. 21—23:) "From within, *out of the heart of men*, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: *all these evil things come from within*, and defile the man." Behold here, brethren, God's own delineation of his fallen creature: one with which every thing in man's sad and shameful history fearfully corresponds. Behold it, and in humble confession of its truth, learn to cry with the Psalmist, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me."

But we are led, by the terms of God's promise in my text, to view this entire corruption of the human heart, more especially, as originating in the *absence of that holy law* of God, as a principle of conduct, which is a true and perfect copy of the divine mind. This absence is clearly assumed, when God engages to *put* this law in the souls of his people.

Man, as he came out of his Creator's hand, "very good," having a spirit in conformity with this perfect rule, is said to have been made "in the image of God." He had a glorious moral likeness to his Maker; a simi-

larity to him in character, and principles of action. But sin, being the transgression of the law, *effaced* this image; destroyed the principle of conformity to God's holy mind and will, and substituted for it a spirit of active opposition and perfect *enmity* thereto. "The carnal mind" (Rom. viii. 7, 8) "is *enmity* against God; *for it is not subject to the law of God*, neither indeed can be. So, then, they that are in the flesh *cannot* please God." Observe, the impossibility arises from the enmity. This is the real secret of man's inability for that which is good: it arises not from original constitution, defect of created capacity thereto; but is the deadly and unconquerable aversion of a corrupt and vile heart from all that is spiritual and godly. So that this inability for good, real as it is, instead of being an excuse for man's wickedness, is of its very *essence*; a special aggravation of his malignity. He cannot turn himself to holiness, only because there is in him a deep-rooted, inbred abhorrence of it.

This irreconcilable hatred, in every natural mind, of the spiritual law of God, the apostle exhibits in an awful light, when (in Rom. vii.) he three times describes its very holiness as a most vehement *provocative* to sin. The principle of evil in the human heart, which lies there comparatively dormant, until the application of this law to condemn it, instantly rises, as one attacked, and rages to *more* ungodliness, when this divine principle of holiness is apprehended as putting a restraint upon its actings. "Sin, *taking occasion by the commandment*," (ver. 8,) "wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead." "Sin, taking occasion by the command-

ment, (ver. 11,) deceived me, and *by it* slew me.” “Sin, that it might appear sin, *working death* in me *by that which is good*, (ver. 13,) that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.”

My brethren, as many of you as are still in a natural state, and yet are conscious of no such opposition of spirit to the blessed God, yea, think, perhaps, in the vanity of your minds, that you love God, serve God, and are keeping this very law to the utmost of your power, let these words of the apostle explain the truth of your condition. You see not the *spirituality* of the law : you understand not its uncompromising demands upon you of holiness in *every thought, word, and deed*, as alone meriting life by it. You have set up a standard *of your own*, by which you judge of God, and *therefore* you are not conscious of the hatred that is in you to his *real* character. By the same standard you measure God’s law ; and therefore, not being condemned by it, you feel no such invincible repugnance to it ; but *your* law is not God’s law. *His* “law is spiritual.” (Rom. vii. 14.) It tries the inmost thoughts and desires of the heart ; it regards the *motive* ; its language is, “Thou shalt *love*.” *You* are regarding the *letter* of it ; and are satisfied with a tolerable freedom from the *grosser* forms of evil which it forbids. Without the law sin is dead : you are not sensible of it. So it was with Paul. “Touching the righteousness which is in the law, I was blameless,” he says, speaking of his unregenerate condition. This was true, as respected the bare *letter* of the precept, while he was, in reality, a bitter enemy of God and his Christ : a proud, self-righteous bigot. The law

spiritually applied, opened his eyes. "When the commandment came, sin revived, (which I thought had been dead,) and I died." (Rom. vii. 9.)

There may be great amiableness of natural character, correctness of moral deportment, strict integrity in our dealings with our fellow men, but these are not the holiness which the law requires, though there can be no holiness where these are wanting. They are good in themselves, and essential to the character of God's people: but outward actions must be estimated by the *motives* which produce them. In the believer, they are the fruit of supreme love to God, entire submission of spirit to his sovereign authority, and apprehension of the beauty and blessedness of holiness. In the natural mind, the *very same* acts are the fruit of self-love, desire of esteem, pride of character, self-righteousness of a blind and foolish heart that would fain be, in some measure, its own saviour; which abhors the charge of depravity that is brought against it in the word of God, and implied in the very terms of the gospel. Hence these actions, good in themselves, and wisely ordered of God for the preservation of the frame of society, are so far from being holiness, in the eye of the heart-searching God, that they are often *direct evidences of enmity* to him, in those who perform them; and when the defects of all such obedience are exposed in the light of the holy law of God, the enmity will instantly discover itself. The case of the young ruler, (Matt. xix. 16,) who came to our Lord with that inquiry, "Good master, what good thing shall I do to inherit eternal life?" is directly in point. He had some reason for his boast, "All these have I kept from my

youth up; what lack I yet?" But when Jesus proved him by that which is indeed the very essence of obedience, supreme love to God, immediately he manifested that his carnal mind was, with all its outward exactness of moral conduct, *alienated from God*. There was that he loved *more*. "He went away sorrowful." The same is the case with every unregenerate man, whatever be his general propriety of conduct, or the character of his religious creed. There is a great work which needs to be wrought in him; and this is, the putting God's laws into his mind, and writing them in his heart. Till this be, spiritual holiness he cannot have.

But in regeneration, the enmity is displaced by delight and love, (Col. i. 21:) a change marvellous indeed, and well justifying those strong terms under which (as we have seen) the Scriptures set it forth. God is replaced on the throne of the human heart, which self and sin occupied before. His image is new created, and gradually perfected there. So the apostle, exhorting to holiness, describes it, (Eph. iv. 22,) as a "putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Observe, it is a *creation after God*, after his image, in righteousness and true holiness. So he represents the believer in another place (Col. iii. 10) as putting on the new man, which is "*renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him.*" In other words, the law of God, the principle of true holiness, is re-established in the inward parts; the man is brought into a prevailing habitual conformity to it, in all its spirituality, as the one governing principle of his life. This is the proper

character of sanctification, as it is a grace of the true Christian. Consider,

II. The *seat* of sanctification. This is, in general, the soul of man: the mind and heart. In both these this blessed principle has its throne, and exerts its paramount, though not undisputed, dominion over the whole man. The *body* of the believer, itself, experiences the benefit of this sanctification. He yields "*his members* as instruments of righteousness unto God." By the mercies of God, he presents his *body* a living sacrifice, *holy*, acceptable unto God. Hence that expostulation of the apostle, "Know ye not that your *bodies* are the members of Christ, . . . the *temple* of the Holy Ghost which is in you?" Hence also that prayer of his for them, "The very God of peace sanctify you *wholly*; and I pray God, your whole spirit, and soul, *and body*, be preserved blameless, unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Divine grace, in the renewed mind, is a pervading, restless principle, that, like leaven, to which it is compared, never ceases its operation, till it have assimilated to itself all with which it comes in contact. It attacks not one vice, and spares another; corrects not one evil habit, and tolerates the rest. The law of the new creation is nothing less than *God's* law; and whatever in thought, word, or deed, whatever in tempers, habits, and dispositions, consists not with perfect love to God and man, (which is "the fulfilling of the law,") that the renewed man instantly detects, by a kind of spiritual instinct before unknown; an antipathy of nature. as true to itself, as uniform in its actings, as that of

water to fire, or of darkness to light. The two cannot exist together in peace.

And this immediately leads me to notice that painful experience, of which every true believer has a keen and continual perception, which is represented in Scripture by the lusting of the flesh against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh: (Gal. v. 17:) the warfare of a law in the members against the law of the mind; (Rom. vii. 23;) and which gives occasion to the distinction of the old man and the new, the natural (or carnal) mind, and the spiritual mind. By these terms are to be understood, not two separate and independent minds, as it were, with their distinct faculties of understanding, willing, choosing, and the like—the one warring against the other, till the weaker dies; but the same man, as he is subject to the actings and strivings of two distinct and opposite principles within him; the older one of corruption, the new of holiness; both operating upon the same mind. Thus it is the same soul that formerly was unregenerate, which is now regenerate; no new powers are given to it, but a *new bias* is given to the old. The leaven of divine grace acts upon the same mass which *was* unleavened. The believer puts off the old man, and puts on the new, by daily warfare against “the lusts of the flesh and of the mind,” and by the practice of all holiness in the fear of God. If God promise, “a *new heart* will I give you,” he explains, in my text, what he means. He does this, when he puts his laws into that *same* heart which was before destitute of a principle of holiness, hardened against this “writing of God” upon it, but now made “a heart of flesh.”

Sin, in all unregenerate persons, is in *undisputed* possession of the whole man. It reigns absolute and alone. They do as Satan would have them, who is described as "the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience." They are, therefore, comparatively, at peace; and Satan would gladly keep them so. It is true, there may be, in such persons, a struggle between *reason* and *passion*, which they vainly mistake for the spiritual conflict of grace and nature. Natural conscience, especially if enlightened by outward acquaintance with divine revelation, will often rebuke sin, and forbid its actings; but this struggle in the natural mind, is a struggle of conviction *against choice*. Depraved reason is *itself* oftentimes on the side of sin, and only clamours against it from the dread of consequences: the anxiety of the soul is not, How shall I *escape* from my *hated* sin? but, How shall I *indulge* my *cherished* sin, and escape the *wages* of it? The issue of it, also, marks its character. Sin finally *prevails*, and *gains* strength by conflict, instead of losing it.

But when God puts his law into any soul, he enters the palace where Satan's goods have been in peace. (Luke xi. 21.) Sin's usurped dominion is overthrown; its power broken; its final destruction sure. The man now *hates* sin; strives against it in all its shapes—against corrupt reason and passion both. Satan and his allies in man—the lusts of the flesh and of the mind—are driven into corners; they cannot tyrannize as before; but they yield not easily. They "war in the members." They must be driven out, inch by inch; and at times, as in the case of David, Peter, and others, they make sudden and desperate efforts, and

seem, for a season, to have regained their wonted empire; and this conflict continues to the end. The old man is *crucified* with the affections and lusts, but he *dies not*, till the believer is delivered from the burden of the flesh, and enters that world where there is sin no more.

But to return. The words of the promise lead us to distinguish two parts in this great work, the sanctification of the human soul.

(1.) The enlightening of the *understanding*, expressed by putting God's laws *into the mind*.

(2.) The engagement of the *affections*, expressed by writing them *in the heart*.

Both these go together, when the man is born again of the Spirit,

(1.) *The enlightening of the understanding.* Sin has darkened the *reason* of man, that by nature he *discerns not* the excellence of that perfect rule which God has given him. He is not convinced of the infinite *reasonableness* of conformity to it, as the mind of God, whose workmanship he is: he counts it, as far as he apprehends its spiritual requirements, to be odious—a hard and iron rule. Yea, his inward thought is, that it would be unjust, and cruel, to deal with him according to the exact tenor of its demands and penalties.

But, in regeneration, the eyes of the mind are enlightened to discover its proper goodness and beauty. Whatever bitter sense there may be of want of individual conformity to it, the man "*consents* unto the law," (as the apostle speaks,) "*that it is good.*" From this discovery springs *conviction* of sin—"godly

sorrow," which, blended, as it will always be, with believing views of "mercy to unrighteousness"—of sin's *removal* through the blood of sprinkling, melts the soul into relentings for it before God; "worketh repentance unto salvation, never to be repented of." Sin can only then be known and felt to be "exceeding sinful," when it is seen in the light of that law of which it is the transgression. "I had not known sin (saith Paul) but by the law; for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet." From *gross* sins he was free: but when God puts this law in his mind, showed him what it really was, spiritual, trying the *appetites* as well as the actions, he could stand before it no longer: it brought him into the dust: in its excellence he saw his own vileness; found nothing but iniquity and rebellion, where he had fancied all was purity and pleasantness in the eye of God. My brethren, repentance for this or that particular *act* is not such as the gospel requires. True evangelical repentance springs from the discovery of an inward *principle of contrariety* to the law of God; a discovery that those outward *actions*, which alone occasion any uneasiness to the natural man, are but *indications* of disease within; only the *overflowings* of that fountain of all iniquity, an evil heart, that is ever sending forth its bitter waters. When this evil is estimated aright, measured by the holy commandment in all its purity, how does the soul abhor itself! No terms are too strong to express the loathing which the penitent sinner has of his past character and condition. Lord, saith he, thy law is holy, and just, and good. Wo is me! that I have been a transgressor of it. It is most

reasonable that thou shouldest require obedience to it: most sweet to be altogether cast into the mould of it. Surely I have been brutish in my ignorance, "even as a beast before thee!"

My beloved brethren, has God's law ever been thus put into your minds? have you so seen its divine beauty and excellence, and been grieved at heart for your natural enmity, your practical rebellions? How precious does such experience make that promise, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more." Nothing commends to the soul, like this, the atonement and righteousness of Christ: when we discover, not the *terrors* merely, but the infinite *excellence* of that law, which we have broken, which Christ has fulfilled *for us*. Then sin looks, as it truly is, most detestable: the soul knows not how to hate it enough: no, nor how enough to love that loving Saviour, who has magnified the law by obeying it as our Surety, and "redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us."

Along with this discovery by the mind of the infinite beauty of God's law, and resulting from it, is,

(2.) *The engagement of the affections* to holiness. "I will write them *in their hearts*." This makes the grace here promised complete: for the judgment and the affections, together, command the man. The judgment *alone* may, at times, be convinced, in *unregenerate* persons, if not of the infinite excellence of God's law, yet of the folly and danger of opposition to it: and the effect of this, under favourable circumstances, may be, a very considerable reformation in many par

ticulars of outward conduct. Satan may go out for a season; and the house will be "swept and garnished;" but it is "*empty*:" its old possessor may say, when he pleases, "I will *return* unto *my* house from whence I came out." God has not *expelled* the strong one, and *taken his place*: the *affections* are yet upon sin; and these, sooner or later, draw away the soul after it, against the clearest dictates of the mind.

But the promise in my text extends to both. "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts." The soul is sweetly, but powerfully, drawn to choose what the judgment has been taught to approve. "I *delight* in the law of God after the inward man." This is one eminent superiority of the new covenant to the old. The same law was given to the people of God, by that dispensation; but it was written only on tables of stone, which tables were themselves broken as soon as written, to signify man's impotence to obey it in any such manner: but, in the new covenant, this law is written "on the fleshly tables of the heart." There is given, not the *rule* only of obedience, but the *spirit* of obedience; there is a taking away the stony heart out of the flesh, and giving a heart of flesh. It is true, this love of God's law was in his saints under the former dispensation. So the Psalmist speaks of the godly man, "The law of his God is *in his heart*; none of his steps shall slide," (Ps. xxxvii. 31;) but they had no *distinct promise* of this grace to plead, as we have. It is now, matter of *covenant engagement*. The *spiritual* engraving of God's law on the minds and hearts of his covenant people, occupies

the *same place* in this new dispensation, which the mere *outward* communication did in the old.

Here, then, we see, at once, the pleasantness and liberty of the service of God in the gospel. For what is God's law? "Thou shalt *love*." When this love is really seated in the heart, when it fills the affections, nothing can be so sweet to the soul as the outgoings of it, in the exercises of holy obedience and worship. O beloved, suspect your religion, suspect your interest in the grace of the covenant, if you have no *affections* towards God, no *delights* in his service. Religion is the *love* of God. The obedience of the believer is an obedience, not of constraint, but of free and hearty choice.

Not by the terrors of a slave
Do they perform his will ;
But, with the noblest powers they have,
His sweet commands fulfil.

The very sorrows and groanings of the believer show on what his affections are set. He mourns over daily experience of a sinful nature ; he writes bitter things against himself, and fears that he is wholly destitute of a principle of holiness, of conformity to the blessed God. But his wretchedness under this experience, his tears and prayers, his strivings, however apparently ineffectual, all witness for him what has his heart—all say for him, more than words, "I delight in the law of God after the inward man." O tempted, troubled fellow Christian, fellow sufferer, thank God these *are* troubles to you : once it was not so : surely that law is

written in your heart, or this conflict had long ago been given up. Remember to whose love you owe it that it is even thus; and encourage yourself, while you consider,

III. The *author* of sanctification. “*I will put I will write.*” God, then, is himself the agent, in the establishment of his law in the hearts and minds of his people. None beneath himself is equal to this great work; indeed, the wondrous terms by which (as we have seen) regeneration is described, demonstrate, of themselves, this truth. The vain heart of a sinner may reckon that there needs nothing more, for being holy, than the determination so to be; but any who have truly made the attempt know it to be otherwise. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?” (both of them natural impossibilities;) “then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.” We confess that men are exhorted in Scripture, “*Make you a new heart, and a new spirit.*” Their insufficiency, as corrupt and fallen, for any good thing, lessens not, one iota, their duty, as creatures of God: and in the conviction of the *necessity* for such a change, and humble *efforts* after it, in prayer to God, that promise is fulfilled, *on which their success entirely depends*,—“A new heart will *I give* you, and a new spirit will *I put* within you.” To this divine energy the apostle everywhere traces the new creation of the soul in Christ Jesus. “If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new; *and all things are of God.*” (2 Cor. v. 17, 18.) So again, (Eph. ii. 9, 10,)

“Not of works, lest any man should boast: for we are *his workmanship*, created *in Christ Jesus* unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” And again, in express reference to this writing of God’s law on the heart, the apostle describes believers as “the epistle of Christ, written, not with ink, but *with the Spirit of the living God*.” (2 Cor. iii. 3.)

This latter is one of those many passages of Scripture in which each of the persons of the blessed Trinity is represented as concurring, and sharing, in the work of grace upon the heart. The act of one is the act of all, who are united in nature and purpose. But this work of sanctification is commonly ascribed, *in a peculiar manner*, to God the Spirit. It is his special office, to which he has voluntarily condescended in the economy of redemption, to create this abiding, soul-transforming principle of holiness in the soul. For this purpose he proceeds from God, and puts forth that mysterious but almighty energy whereby the “dead in sins and the uncircumcision of their flesh” are “quickened together with Christ,” made partakers of one spiritual life with him, through faith in his name.

The outward means which he uses as preparatory, and auxiliary, to this great work, are endlessly diversified. Sometimes he draws his people, by his “still, small voice” in their souls, to attend to the things which belong to their peace. They are early brought to know the Lord: are not able exactly to date any *particular era* of conversion to God, but are led, by insensible degrees, into saving fellowship with Christ,

manifesting itself by heavenly affections, growing delight in God, and habitual conformity to his will. Others are led into deeper and more humbling acquaintance with the depravity of their hearts. They are left, for a season, to run the round of sin and folly, with a world that "lieth in wickedness." In this state the Spirit of God finds the greater number of those whom he designs to save.

With these also his methods of mercy are various. He awakens them by some apparently casual circumstance; speaks to them by some affecting providence; he visits them with sharp afflictions; imbitters their cup of earthly happiness, that he may fix their affections on that which is substantial and abiding. He blesses, to others, the word of godly admonition. The counsel of a pious parent, an affectionate friend, a faithful pastor, long perhaps unheeded and despised, is made "quick and powerful" in the day of his loving-kindness; or he wounds the conscience with his secret rebukes; terrifies with apprehensions of deserved and impending wrath; their souls are far off from peace; they go mourning all the day long, crying out, in the bitterness of their souls, O wretched man that I am, how shall I escape from the wrath to come? What shall I do to be saved?

These things are not regeneration, but they are all means employed towards it, by the Spirit of love, in those for whom he designs so excellent a benefit. O how does the soul of the believer in Jesus overflow, at times, with gratitude—how does he adore the amazing condescension of this blessed Spirit, when he calls to remembrance this day of his *especial* long-suffering—

when he reflects on his own perverseness, his froward resistance of these methods of his grace; and the gentle teachings, the parental chastenings, the unalterable compassions, of him who would not let him die,—when he traces the links in that wondrous chain of, apparently, accidental events, which were all working together, in the unsearchable wisdom of God, for fulfilling towards him the designs of that love which was from everlasting!

As the *means* are *various*, so the *mode* of their efficacy in the hand of the Spirit is *incomprehensible*. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit.” The effect is undeniable; but if it be asked *how* it is produced, and why the same outward circumstances should produce it in one, and not in another, the only answer that can be given is, So it hath pleased God.

But we must remark that, whatever be the variety, in *other* respects, of the means which are made subservient to this great end—the regeneration of the human soul,—the principal, often the *sole* instrument in the hands of the Spirit, whereby he imparts this divine life, is the written, or preached word. “The sword of the Spirit” is “the word of God.” (Eph. vi. 17.) By this he convinces of sin; by this he reveals Christ as a suitable and all-sufficient Saviour; and having thus caused the souls whom he has touched to discover their own need, and Christ’s fulness, he enables them, by the gift of precious faith, called, “the faith of God’s elect,” (Tit. i. 1,) to embrace God’s record of his Son;

to *appropriate* him and his work, as an atonement for their sins, a righteousness for their persons, a sufficient title to the inheritance of eternal life; and henceforth he abides in them as "the Spirit of adoption, whereby they cry, Abba, Father." (Rom. viii. 15.)

In this illumination by the Spirit, this revelation of Christ, and creation of faith in him, through the word, lies the very essence of regeneration. Believers are therefore described as born again, instrumentally, *by the word*. "Of his own will *begat* he us, *by the word of truth*." (Jam. i. 18.) "Being *born again*," saith St. Peter, "not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, *by the word of God*, which liveth and abideth for ever. . . . And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." (1 Pet. i. 23, 25.)

The gospel is the word of the Spirit; his great instrument in the conversion of sinners to God. Hence this gospel, in opposition to the old dispensation, (which only made known the *terms* of the law, and was therefore one of condemnation,) is called "the ministration of the Spirit." (2 Cor. iii. 8.) This is its peculiar glory. The Spirit of Christ accompanies it to the hearts of his people, effectually renewing them thereby in the spirit of their minds, and working *in* them what it requires *of* them. And as this is the chief instrument employed by the Spirit in first regenerating believers, so also in *carrying on* the work of their sanctification, throughout their earthly pilgrimage. It is the "glass," in which "beholding the glory of the Lord, they are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." (2 Cor. iii. 18.)

A few lessons of great value are immediately sug-

gested by the subject we have been considering. A brief notice of them must now suffice. Learn,

1. The mercy which distinguishes one man from another is not the result of holiness *foreseen* in the subjects of it. The terms of the covenant of grace run directly counter to such a notion. Sanctification is promised in it to sinners, as *a free gift*. "I will put (or give) my laws into their mind;" and accordingly David prays, in words which are an exact echo to this promise, "*Grant me thy law, graciously.*" (Ps. cxix. 29.) The work of sanctification is one which God, as alone equal to it, undertakes to accomplish in his people when he has had mercy on their unrighteousness. So, in a passage already quoted, the believer is said to be *God's* workmanship, *created* in Christ Jesus, not *because* of good works, but *unto* them. Further, the "purpose of God according to election" is expressly declared, in opposition to any such dream of foreseen goodness in man, to be "*not of works*, but of him that calleth." (Rom. ix. 11.) It is the conviction of this truth that, while it fills the believer with overflowing gratitude to God for his distinguishing love, keeps him also low in deepest humiliation. "Not unto us, but unto thy name be the praise!" God has begotten him again, "*of his own will*;" and this is the only reason that he is out of hell: a brand plucked from the burning, that might have been left to perish as well as others! *See note 11.* Learn,

2. Holiness is connected with mercy, as the effect with its cause. The revelation of mercy to unrighteousness is God's great means for winning the sinner, from his enmity, to love and delight in him. I will

sanctify, saith he, for I will be merciful. These two can never be disjoined. We have already touched upon their connexion in the first discourse; but the remark will bear repeating in the ears of those who long after holiness, and sigh to find the little progress which they make in it. Would you grow in holiness, pray and strive for deeper insight continually into the mystery of God's love to you in Christ. Live in the genial beams of it. Nothing but this will thaw the frozen affections of your soul, or prevail against the force of corruption in an evil heart. It is the *joy of the Lord* that is your *strength*. (Neh. viii. 10.) It is *the cross* by which the world is crucified unto you, and you unto the world. (Gal. vi. 14.) Learn,

3. Sanctification is never perfect while the believer is in the body. The conflict between the flesh and the spirit continues to the end, with various success; but, upon the whole, the actings of corruption get weaker, and the habit of grace strengthens in the soul. Still, the spark of evil is *not extinguished*. Satan lives, and, if permitted, can easily rekindle it into a flame. This he is ever seeking to do; fanning it by the temptations of the world and the flesh, or by suggestions of "spiritual wickedness." Knowledge is imperfect, (1 Cor. xiii. 12,) and therefore holiness must needs be so too. A state of sinless perfection is thus wholly unattainable by the Christian in this world. "In many things we offend all." (Jam. iii. 2.) "If we" (even an apostle) "say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." (1 John i. 8.) Thus the Scriptures plainly declare such profession to be a delusion: it is a dream that can only consist with low

notions of the spirituality and perfect holiness of the divine law: it is contradicted by the experience and recorded confessions of the most eminent saints of God in all ages: and is, further, in opposition to all the characters under which Christian experience is described in Scripture—as a race, a warfare, a wrestling against spiritual enemies, who certainly are not slain but at the last; a crucifixion, which, though it surely *terminate* in death, is lingering.

In some sense, indeed, the Christian *is* a *perfect* character. He is perfectly justified in Christ. In him he has a complete righteousness to trust in before God: Christ is his law-fulfiller, the ark of his refuge, the depository of the law for him. Further, the Christian is perfect, in respect of the purpose of God to complete his own holy image, the graving of his law, upon the soul. Of this the believer has an earnest, in that nothing less than the perfect sway of that principle of holiness which God has already implanted there, will ever *satisfy* him. He is struggling to maturity, “not as though he had already attained, either were already perfect; but this one thing he does, forgetting the things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, he presses toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” This is Christian perfection, as attainable below:—*the resting satisfied with nothing short of it*. Take the cases of those who are called perfect in Scripture, and it is clear, to demonstration, that they are so described, not as being *absolutely* free from sin, but because holiness was the *ruling* principle and *habit* of their souls. (Compare Gen. vi. 9, with ix. 21. Job i. 8, with xl. 4.

Phil. iii. 12, with v. 15. 1 John iii. 6, 9, with i. 8, 10.)
Learn,

4. The law of the Ten Commandments is still the *rule of life* to the believer. From the law, *as a covenant*, we are eternally *delivered*, through Christ. We may plead our title to heaven on the ground of our perfect fulfilment of its righteousness, inasmuch as Christ's fulfilment of it is imputed to us who believe. We may plead perfect exemption from its curse ; for Christ has been "made a curse for us." As a means, therefore, of meriting life, we have *nothing whatever to do with the terms of it*. Eternal life is *given* us in Christ. (1 John v. 11.) But we are *therefore* "delivered from the law," "*that the righteousness of the law may be fulfilled in us*, who walk, not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." (Rom. viii. 2, 4, compare Rom. vii. 6.) The law of Christ is indeed a law of love ; but, still, this "new commandment" is the "old commandment which ye had from the beginning." (1 John ii. 7.) The apostles, in warning against sin, or exhorting to duty, refer continually *to the letter* of the Ten Commandments, and found their argument on it. "Children, obey you parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honour thy father and mother, *which is the first commandment with promise*." (Eph. vi. 2.) An argument, surely, of no weight, if the commandment, *as such*, were abolished. (Compare Rom. xiii. 8, 9. Gal. v. 13, 14. Jam. ii. 9—11.) The moral law is God's own *application* of that *general principle* of love which is the fulfilling of it, to the *particular condition of man* as a sinner. As long, therefore, as that condition lasts, it must needs be valuable and

necessary to him, *as a guide* for the regulation of his walk with a holy God ; and it is much to be feared, that the setting aside the *letter* of the precept for a *general* obligation of love, would lead, if commonly adopted, to great laxity of moral conduct. General principles, which admit of various interpretation, are a sure refuge of unsound professors.

And here let me observe, in reference to those who would make the freeness of grace in the gospel an encouragement to carelessness of living, that, of all perversions of it, none is more detestable or ruinous ; no state of mind more hopeless. The *one* end of God in the gospel, as respects man, is to recover him to *holiness*, by the overwhelming manifestation of his love in Christ. This is the *ultimate* blessing of the covenant. Mercy to unrighteousness is but a *preliminary* hereto: the method which God takes, in his *detestation* of sin, as the most effectual for *freeing* the sinner from the love and power of it. The very name of him in whose salvation we boast manifests its character. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, *for he shall save his people from their sins.*" Clearly, then, the man who can count it any mercy to be delivered from this blessed rule of obedience is under the most dreadful delusion and bondage of the devil. He turns a scheme that is the perfection of glory of a holy God, into one worthy to be conceived in hell itself. "Do we make void the law through faith ? God forbid: yea, we *establish* the law."

Indeed *holiness* is but another name for *happiness* : the same thing, in essence, with the glory of heaven ; and therefore the Scriptures speak of the progressive

sanctification of the believer as a change into the same image with his Lord, "*from glory to glory.*" St. Paul expresses it by the very same term. Enumerating the several links in the chain of salvation, from the eternal purpose of God to its final consummation in glory, he omits sanctification altogether : or rather, he includes it in the term, *glory*, as being the same thing with it : "Whom he justified, them he also glorified." In the progress of sanctification below, the believer has the earnest and foretaste of that perfect bliss which is prepared for him above.

O may all they who triumph in redeeming grace show forth the reality of their experience of it, by this growing likeness to Christ ! "He that saith he abideth in him, ought himself also to walk, even as he walked." Lastly learn,

5. The security of the believer in Jesus. Sovereign grace, following up its own eternal purpose, has begun, in time, the sanctification of his soul, without respect to any thing, in him, but his entire inability to begin it of himself. God has put his hand to the work. and who shall let it ? What reason shall be found, why he should forsake the work of his own hands ?—a work undertaken in the foresight of all the natural perverseness and depravity of the heart on which he works. Hence the church of old confidently appeals to God, (Isa. xxvi. 12 :) "Lord, thou wilt ordain peace for us ; *for thou also hast wrought all our works in us.*" Here is the great encouragement which a poor diseased, but believing sinner has, to strive after holiness in the fear of God. The man who knows any thing of the dreadful tyranny, the deep-seated dominion of

evil in his soul, when he feels that, unless it be overthrown, unless this plague and corruption be exchanged for health and purity, he can never see a holy God, is ready to faint and die; to give up all for lost; to conclude it impossible that he shall ever be saved. O but, beloved, "what is impossible with men is possible with God." God is on your side. Be you ever so fast bound with the chains of sin, only cry out to God under your bondage; be *willing* to be free; and though the struggle be long and terrible, the issue is sure. He who had mercy on sinners, even to the giving the Son of his love to be a curse, to be a bloody sacrifice for them, gives this promise along with him, "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts."

Jesus was "manifested to destroy the works of the devil." By his death he destroyed the guilt, and so the enmity, which must for ever have separated sinners from God; and when he rose, and ascended on high, he "received gifts"—the gifts of the Spirit—"for *the rebellious*," to witness to them the removal of all their guilt through his blood, and to fulfil this very promise of the covenant in their hearts. It is the special part and office of the Holy Spirit in the economy of redemption: and, assuredly, what he has undertaken he will accomplish. We are "predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son." Well, then, let Satan rage, and seem to succeed, for a time, against our souls: let inward corruption be mighty, and our spirits sink under its awful force: he whose "purpose shall stand, and he will do all his pleasure,"—he who has given us any real desire which we have after holi-

ness, will not fail his own work. "The bruised reed will he not break ; the smoking flax will he not quench, till he send forth judgment unto victory." He has covenanted to sanctify all whom he freely justifies: if you believe in him for the one blessing, it is impossible you can ever fail of the enjoyment of the other: it is a promise of that covenant, the character of which is, that it is "*ordered in all things, and sure.*" His *methods* of fulfilment of it are indeed *various*. He carries on the work of sanctification, at some times more sensibly than at others: but, whether it be by refreshing ordinances, or humbling discoveries of inward and unsuspected depravity, or sharp afflictions which search out, and consume the dross of earthly affections; *all these*, one as well as another, are working together, in the love and faithfulness of our covenant God, for the complete accomplishment of his word, "I will put my law into their hearts." If indeed then, you desire conformity to it, learn to acquiesce in present painful dispensations of God toward you. They are doing for you the very good upon which your heart is set: and though they "seem not for the present joyous, but grievous," afterwards they will "work the peaceable fruits of righteousness in you that are exercised thereby." Blessed, only blessed are all they, in whom (by whatever methods it may be) God is fulfilling this grace! They are truly interested in his covenant: they have the surest tokens of his mercy being towards them; and when the days of their pilgrimage are over, they shall be "satisfied," for they shall "awake with his likeness."

PART V.

DIVINE RELATIONSHIP.

HEBREWS viii. 10.—*I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.*

WHEN first a sinner is awakened by God's spirit to discern his danger as a transgressor, the immediate result is, usually, *dread* of God, and deep anxiety for deliverance from that tremendous wrath which is, now, really felt to be impending. At such a time, no assurance is so sweet, to the troubled conscience, as that, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more;" or that, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

But the man who has indeed been led into this saving acquaintance with his own guilt as a transgressor, and the efficacy of the blood of Jesus to procure eternal oblivion of it all, rests not here. The Spirit who convinces of sin, and leads effectually to Jesus for the removal of it through faith in his blood, is that same Spirit of holiness, whose sanctifying influences in the renewing of the mind we have already considered.

The sinner, laying hold, by his mighty operation, on the covenant of grace, resting all his hopes on the foundation which God has laid,—even the free and full forgiveness of all iniquities in Christ, finds the other part of this covenant, which depends upon it, fulfilled also in his experience. God, having had mercy on his unrighteousness, puts his laws into his mind, and writes them in his heart. Henceforth he delights in the law of God after the inward man; he daily discovers more of its reasonableness and excellent goodness; and thus he is necessarily drawn to delight in him whose law it is. He sees God to be altogether lovely; and begins to feel a child-like *desire towards him* with whom, hitherto, he had shunned communion. Thus we find God connecting the promise of my text with the renewal of the mind unto holiness, (Ezek. xi. 19, 20:) “And I will give them one heart, and I will put a new spirit within you; and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh, and will give them a heart of flesh, that they may walk in my statutes, and keep mine ordinances:” and then follows hereupon, “And they shall be my people, and I will be their God.”

Further, God is now contemplated, not only in the beauty of his *holiness*, but, especially, in the glory of his redeeming *love*; as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and, in him, as the author of all mercy to sinners; so loving the world as to give his only begotten Son, “that the world through him might be saved.” This discovery gives an attractiveness to the divine character which was never felt before. It is, now, no longer enough merely to be safe from the terrors of his hand, but we must have a place in his heart. To have this

God as *our* God,—reconciled *to us* in Christ, to enjoy his favour, to walk with him as a friend,—speaking to him in prayer and praise, and hearing his voice in his word and ordinances,—to have a meetness for his presence, and the eternal vision and fruition of him in the world of spirits,—these are, now, the things after which the renewed soul pants. “My soul is athirst for God, for the living God; when shall I come and appear before God?”

Thus the spirit of *holiness*, and of *revelation* in the knowledge of Christ, is also a Spirit of *adoption*. The sinner, who by nature was “afar off,” and “alienated in his mind by wicked works,” is now sweetly drawn to God in holy desire and love; is “*made nigh* by the blood of Christ.” This is the great end which God designed to accomplish by the sacrifice of his Son. “It hath pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of his cross, *by him to reconcile all things unto himself.*” Herein is Christ crucified eminently seen to be “the *power* of God, and the *wisdom* of God.” By the gospel of his Son he wins the hearts of rebels back again to himself; brings them nigh, that he may communicate his whole self to them in goodness; yea, *adopts* outcasts and aliens into his very family! makes them “sons of God!” “heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ!”

Such is that privilege of the saints which we are now to consider. O may every soul that hears of it know, by experience, what it means!

To the grace of *pardon*, and the grace of *renewal*, succeeds the grace of *adoption*, in the order of bless-

ings of this covenant: whereby God, in infinite condescension, is pleased to stand to redeemed sinners in the relation of *a father*. They walk with him as "*dear children*." They are broken off from all connexion with that old family of the first Adam, in which they were born; and in which they "were, by nature, *children of wrath*, even as others." The entail of the curse is cut off; and they become interested in all the privileges of that family in which Jesus Christ himself is the first begotten: they are brethren with him, "of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named."

Before we enter more at length upon this interesting topic, I may observe, that it is presented, in the words before us, under a slightly different aspect: but the two, "I will be to them a Father," and "I will be to them a God," are essentially the same; as we shall instantly see, by referring to Rev. xxi. 7, or by comparing together the sixteenth and eighteenth verses of 2 Cor. vi. (See also Hos. i. 10.) The promise of God to be a God to his people, necessarily *includes* the other; gives it, and adds whatever can be conceived besides of blessedness, along with it; for whatever be comprehended in the relation of a father, whether authority, or wisdom or love, certainly this relation of God, as a God to any, must more than comprise—must go far beyond it all. It reminds believers that their Father is none other than the infinite Jehovah, the Almighty, Everlasting God! And so the expression of their relation to him as *a people*, who are also his *children*, teaches what is due to him who has given them the adoption of sons. He who is their Father, is

also *their Lord*; and so demand, not only their filial love, but profound subjection and loyalty. "He is thy Lord, and worship thou him." (Ps. xlv. 11.) The relation, then, expressed in my text is one of paternity. God, in this promise, makes the grant of the privilege of adoption, in the largest terms in which that grant can be conveyed.

The first spring of this unspeakable privilege of the saints, is their everlasting designation thereto, in the purpose of God's love towards them, in Christ. "Having *predestinated* us," (saith the apostle,) "unto the *adoption of children* by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved." (Eph. i. 5, 6.) The work of this Beloved one is the means by which God effects the purpose of his grace; taking, hereby, every impediment to its exercise out of the way. "God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, *that we might receive the adoption of sons.*" (Gal. iv. 4, 5.) Thus the work of Christ lays the foundation on which rests the grant of this blessing. "He is our peace." "He came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh;" (Gentiles and Jews.) "For through him we both have access, by one Spirit, unto the Father. Now, therefore, ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God." (Eph. ii. 14, 17, 18.)

With this *purpose* of the Father, and *work* of the Son, must concur also the *operation* of the Holy Spirit,

before this peace is effected, this privilege of adoption actually conferred upon the heirs of promise. "We have access *by one Spirit.*" It is *his* office to bring the sons of God into the *enjoyment* of that high relation—to establish friendly intercourse between the soul and its God. The principle of holy delight in God, and desire after him, is first implanted, by the Spirit, in regeneration. Therein the believer is begotten of God, by the word of truth, (Jam. i. 18,) through faith in him whose salvation it reveals; and *with this faith* is immediately connected *the privilege* of which we are speaking. "As many as received him, to them gave he power, or privilege, to become the *sons* of God, *even to them that believe on his name:* which were *born*, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but *of God.*" (John i. 12, 13. Compare Gal. iii. 26.) This privilege, of being the sons of God, is *made known* to believers by the same Spirit, who dwells in them for this end. "Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." (Gal. iv. 6. Compare Rom. viii. 14—16.) He it is who draws out the affections of believers after God; sheds abroad his love in their hearts, and so constrains them to returns of love: he encourages the trembling, yet longing penitent, to approach God through Christ; witnesses to him of peace through the blood of sprinkling; gives some sweet hope, though faint it may be at first, of acceptance in the beloved; and cherishes this hope into the steady and matured confidence and joy of faith. There are times, too, when, in a more especial manner, he "bears witness with our spirits that we are the

children of God.” We are enabled to rise above our doubts, to feel *assured* of an interest in Christ, to see the evidences of a real work of grace in our hearts, and to call God, in the unhesitating language of adoption, Abba, Father.

My brethren, what know you of this experience? I speak not, now, of the joy of assurance; that the tried, tempted believer may, many times, be without; he may know but little of it at any time. But what know you of this *drawing* of the Spirit, that makes the service of God a *pleasant* service; that brings you often to a throne of grace, to pour out your hearts in secret and fervent aspirations after God; that will not let you rest without, at least, a comfortable *hope* of your *personal* interest in his love. “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God.” But “if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.” The spirit of the world, (whether of the openly ungodly, or of the professing world,) is a “spirit of bondage,” of slaves, and not of sons. Dread of God, dislike of spiritual service, weariness and drudgery in the round of religious duties, and distance from God in all of them—these are the features of it. But “where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.” This was God’s design in the gospel: that we “might serve him *without fear*, in holiness and righteousness before him.” There is no slavery, no irksomeness, or constraint, in the service of the believer. It is one of *choice*—a service of the heart pressing after a desired and supremely beloved object. This is what wholly distinguishes *his* walk with God from that of others. Holiness, after a sort, all, who would have hope towards God, feel them-

selves bound to pursue, though none but the believer has any sufficient principles for its attainment: but service *in love*, pursuit after God *for his own sake*, for the glorious goodness which there is in him, is what none know but they into whose hearts "God hath shined, to give them the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of Jesus Christ." (2 Cor. iv. 6.) It is precisely this spirit, in religion, which men call enthusiasm: the giving *the affections* to God. Religion, in the form and shell of it, is respectable with many; but religion in this, the essence of it, is odious and intolerable to those whose hearts are set on vanity and sense.

But, beloved, of this religion the Bible is full. "As the hart," saith David, "panteth after the water brooks," (the strongest figure, perhaps, that nature can furnish,) "so panteth my soul after thee, O God." "Then will I go to the altar of God, unto God **MY EXCEEDING JOY**; yea, upon the harp will I praise thee, O God, my God." Hear again the language of the ancient church, by the prophet, (Isa. xxvi. 9:) "*With my soul* have I *desired* thee in the night; yea, *with my spirit within me* will I *seek thee early*." The book of Canticles is wholly unintelligible, but as expressing the same ardent affection of the believing soul, going forth, in all the fervour of insatiable desire, after him whom alone it loveth. "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth, for thy love is better than wine." "Draw me, we will run after thee." "Set me as a seal upon thy heart, as a seal upon thine arm; for love is strong as death, jealousy is cruel as the grave." (Cant. i. 2, 4, and viii. 6.) The soul that has

seen God in Christ knows a little what these affections mean ; and its shame is, not to have these affections,—no, but that days and months so often pass away, with so little of these consuming desires after the blessed God. O may it please him to kindle in us this holy flame—to create in us this sweetness of devout desire after him, while we consider the wonderful promise of my text—the second promise of that covenant which is founded on mercy to unrighteousness—“I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.”

Herein God makes himself over to us as ours ; and as he gives himself to us, so he further declares the purpose of his grace, that we shall give ourselves to him ; we shall be his people, and he our God. Happy are they among us in whose hearts God has put a desire for this blessedness ! It is thus that he fulfils the promise : “satisfieth the *longing* soul, and filleth the *hungry* soul with goodness.” We are to consider, then, from these words,

I. A mutual relation of God and men.

II. God himself engaging for both. *I will*, and *they shall*.

I. A mutual relation of God and men. “I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.” The first part of this promise will principally occupy our attention, at this time. It conveys, as we have seen, the privilege of adoption : but, without confining ourselves to this particular view of God, as a Father, we are now to contemplate him as giving himself to his people, in that most comprehensive of all relations, “I will be to them A GOD.”

Who shall adequately express what is contained in this "exceeding great and precious promise?" If none can by searching find out God, then can no searching fathom the immensity of bliss here freely made over to us in covenant. Here are indeed "unsearchable riches," love which "passeth knowledge." "I will be to them a God." In other words, whatever I am in myself, that I will be *to them*; of that they shall have the free use and advantage, the full and blessed experience: all my perfections will I exert for their present and everlasting welfare. How greatly do we need the increase of faith, to receive this amazing promise! to be persuaded of it, and embrace it, to the comfort and joy of our souls. It seems far too good and great to be really ours; few of us dare to live upon it, and rejoice in it. That God should give us *some* blessings, as his creatures, though we be *fallen* creatures, may seem reasonable, from what we know of his abundant mercy; that he should give us even many and great spiritual blessings, through Christ, may seem to be but the due reward of his sufferings and obedience in our behalf; but that he should give us *himself*—that he should be what he is, and have what he has, and do what he does, *for us*—that we should have the same benefit of his infinite perfections, so to speak, as if they were our own: so that we may call them ours,—all that he has ours, as respects the use and benefit of it;—this, I say, is a vastness of divine bounty, which exceeds our utmost thoughts. We shrink from appropriating it; we try to live on something less for happiness. But, he who knows the souls that he has made, knows that nothing, beneath himself, can ever fill their

boundless desires and capacities for enjoyment. No gifts of nature, no, nor even the highest and largest gifts of grace itself, can supply the place of him who is the Author of them all.

“I will be to them a God.” The first intimation of so unspeakable a blessing was made to Abraham, the father of the faithful. (Gen. xvii. 7 :) “I will establish my covenant between me and thee, . . . to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.” In that promise, Abraham saw the day of Christ, and was glad, (John viii. 36;) and, in virtue of it, all his spiritual seed enjoyed this, and other blessings of the covenant, before the coming of the Saviour, in a manner suited to the dispensation under which they lived. Indeed *all* the seed of Abraham, natural as well as spiritual, experienced, in some sort, the fulfilment of this promise. So early as when God sent Moses to Pharaoh, to demand the liberation of his people, he sent this message to them, (Ex. vi. 5, 7,) “I have heard the groaning of the children of Israel, . . . and I have *remembered my covenant*, . . . and *I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God.*” But the relation between God and Israel was, as respected the great body of that people, merely national, and rested on their adherence to the terms of the covenant established with them at Mount Sinai. The covenant we are considering is a “better covenant, established upon better promises,” even *spiritual* promises to a *spiritual seed*. The persons to whom God here engages to be a God, and that they shall be to him a people, are the same on whose “unrighteousness” he “has mercy;” and further, the same in whose minds he has put his laws, and written

them in their hearts. Thus they are evidently “a holy nation, a peculiar people,” washed in the blood of Jesus, and renewed unto true and inward holiness by the Spirit of Jesus; and so, each individual of them, objects of God’s special delight and distinguishing favour. This is that to which, in his everlasting love towards them in Christ, he purposed to bring them. He gave them this grace *in him*, before time was. (1 Tim. i. 9.) He provided for them, as *polluted* sinners, the laver of a Saviour’s blood; and, as *depraved* sinners, “the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost;” and these he provided, that, they being so washed and sanctified, he might give them the fulness of all spiritual blessings, of the enjoyment of which they were thus made capable: yea, that he might give himself, the uncreated fulness, that “fillet all in all,” even himself, to them; and might receive them back again, in the most sweet and entire surrender of their whole souls to him, as their soul-ravishing bliss,—in the captivation of all their affections, and in the exclusive employment of all their faculties in his service. “I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.”

There is this peculiarity in the promise we are now considering, that it is not, like the other promises, limited to the present state of being; not one which has its value from the guilt, or depravity, or ignorance, of those to whom it is made. Such are those which have already passed under review. What, for instance, can be more precious to a guilty conscience than that assurance, “I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no

more?" What more dear, to a creature sensible of corruption, than that promise, "I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts?" But these are evidently precious, as medicine is precious for a diseased body: take away the guilt, take away the corruption, and these promises are no longer suitable. They have done their office; the sweetness of them is, as it were, extracted; heaven will have no need of them. Not so, brethren, with the promise before us. It is one that is too large for time: one that dies not of itself, when sin dies in the believer. It runs into—it runs throughout eternity. The bliss of heaven, through all the countless ages of it, is summed up in this, "I will be to them a God." Hence you find it expressly mentioned as making the perfect bliss of the saints, in that continuing city which is to come, (Rev. xxi. 3,) "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them; and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God."

At present, however, we are concerned with it chiefly as it is to be fulfilled in time, in the experience of the saints. It is in *this* world, as well as in the world to come, that God is a God to the believer. Now, observe, that this is a character which he bears to none beside. He may, in a sense, be called the God *of* others, for "he is the God of the spirits of all flesh." (Num. xxvii. 16.) But while men live without God in the world, there is nothing, in this consideration but what is terrible. He stands to them in the relation of an Almighty Creator, a gracious preserver, an all-wise moral governor, a patient and forbearing, yet observant

judge. But he is a God *to* none but those who are spiritually in covenant with him through Christ; and *all other* relations he may bear to sinful men leave them under the awful curse of a broken law; in danger of that "wrath to come," which shall be "upon every soul of man that doeth evil." But this curse being removed, in Christ, from the believing soul, and a principle of holy delight in the divine character created there, through the power of the Holy Ghost, room is made, as it were, for God to exercise all his perfections *for the good* of redeemed sinners. To them he will be a God. His power, his wisdom, his holiness, his truth, his goodness,—whatever attribute there be of God,—all shall be engaged *on their behalf*; all communicated to them, according to their various need, and their capacities for enjoyment: he will be these *for them*.

Herein lies the exceeding greatness and preciousness of the promise, that it *includes every other* promise of *particular* blessedness, and gives it in its uncreated spring. Take, for instance, grace, peace, strength. God does not, here, say that he will give one, or other, of these blessings; but he will be "*a God to them*:" so that they shall have the *fountain* to draw from: he will *be* to them *that very thing* which their souls need, so that they shall feel themselves in the possession of it, in all its fulness. It is to lead us to this view of God, and the triumphant expectation of all needful good *in God*, that the apostle, when he desires any particular spiritual blessing for his converts, directs them to him, *under that very name*, as the God of it. So he calls God "*the God of all grace*."

“The God of *peace*.” “The God of *patience and consolation* grant you to be like-minded, one toward another, according to Christ Jesus.” “The God of *hope* fill you with all joy and peace in believing.” Thus he sets him forth, according to the need they had of him, as *being* that very thing,—the God of it, to them. The God of grace, peace, hope, patience, and consolation; the same who hath promised, “I will be *to them* a God.” Here is their personal interest in what he is.

Brethren, this was the way of God, when he first laid the *foundation of all blessing* to sinners, in the Lord Jesus Christ. What was it they then needed? They needed mercy to their unrighteousness. Now, how did God give this mercy? Not in measure; no, but *himself* became *all mercy* to them, *in the person of Jesus Christ*. In him God said, of every poor guilty sinner, needing the fullest, freest compassion and pardon, redemption from the curse, and from everlasting wrath, “I will be a God to them,” in the way of mercy! Yes, beloved, “God” in Christ “is LOVE,” all love. Get but an interest in Jesus, and you shall never know God in any other character. “God was in Christ, *reconciling* the world unto himself.” “God so *loved* the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Here is all love indeed! God has *made himself* MERCY to us, in his Son. This is his glory, as it shines forth in the face of Jesus Christ, who is the “brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person.” O this was to act like God indeed! to look upon poor, perishing, rebel

man, and to make himself, in the person of his beloved Son, a God for their deliverance; all love and pity, all grace and sufficiency, for their salvation! "He, *of God*, is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." And if these were *the beginnings* of his way towards his people, when they were in all their natural loathsomeness and depravity, how shall he not be a God to them, as they are beheld in Christ? partakers of his grace, in the justification of their persons, and the sanctification of their spirits? If he be reconciled to us, as enemies, how shall he not save us, as his friends? (Rom. v. 9, 10.)

The method which God takes for the accomplishment of this great promise to his people, thus reconciled in Christ, marks the settled purpose of his heart to fulfil it to the uttermost. He *comes* himself, and *abides* in them for this end!

Having expelled the strong one armed, he takes his place; manifests himself immediately to his people; owns them as his; enables them to call him theirs; and gladdens them with growing discoveries of all he is, and has, as that in which they are personally interested, as that which he is *to them*, and has *for them*, and which shall be theirs, because he is theirs, for ever. This amazing privilege of the saints was, like all the rest, set forth, in type and shadow, under the old dispensation, under which God, as the God of the nation of Israel, had his tabernacle in the midst of them, and the Shechinah (or resident glory) abode therein. "I will set my tabernacle among you, and my soul shall not abhor you; and I will walk among you, *and will be your God, and you shall be my people.*" (Lev.

xxvi. 11, 12.) This, however, was but a *shadow* of the good things to come under a better covenant. God, under the gospel covenant, dwells not among his people, externally, by visible symbols of divine glory, in a material tabernacle ; but he makes the body and soul of every individual believer to be his temple, in which he abides always, through his Spirit, and reveals himself as he does not unto the world. So the apostle expressly applies the promise above cited, as relating, not to any outward manifestation of God, as the God of a community, but as true in the person of every real Christian. For *ye are the temple* of the living God ; as God hath said, “ I will dwell *in them*, and walk in them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.” (2 Cor. vi. 16. Compare 1 Cor. vi. 19.)

God, then, makes himself a God to his people, communicates himself to them, *by indwelling*. “ I will *dwell* in them, and *walk* in them, and I will be their God.” Here the experience of the church, and that of the world, totally separate. The world know nothing whatever of this, *nor wish* to know : it is enough for them to be religious at certain seasons ; to pay their decent measure of attention to divine service, and so to keep God satisfied, while they go after vanity : beyond this, they have no thoughts of God, nor desire for converse with him ; they count all pretensions to it, such as the believer makes, hypocrisy or delusion. To entertain the idea of such familiar converse with God, such abiding of God in the believer, and the believer in him, appears the height of impiety and presumption.

But the believer in Jesus knows it to be a blessed

reality. All the life and power of his religion consist in it. If any thing interrupt his sense of it, all sweetness of ordinances is gone. The soul cannot be happy, till those cheering, warming beams, that light of the divine countenance, shine again in his soul. "Thou didst hide thy face, and I was troubled." O, saith David, when returning to God after a long night of desertion, through his shameful sin, Whatever thou doest, "cast me not away from thy presence ; take not thy holy Spirit from me." The interrupted sense which the child of God has of this divine presence, and gracious fellowship, is the chief source of his sorrow, in this evil world. His enemies know this, and press all their advantage this way. If carelessness of walk surprise the soul into sin ; if ordinances yield not always the same sweetness ; if afflictions, in the providence of God, fall heavy upon the soul, and the believer be called to walk in darkness, for the exercise of faith, and patience, and hope in God—immediately, the adversary taunts him with the suggestion, Where is now thy God? If the soul can but be persuaded it has lost the presence of God, and all interest in him along with it, it is the sport of every temptation with which a malicious foe may be permitted to buffet it. Afflictions could be borne, guilt could be faced, if he might call God *his* God ; but if God be thought to have withdrawn himself, the soul is in bitterness indeed. "My tears have been my meat, day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God?" Let those who are so exercised listen to that holy mourner, instructing them, from his own experience, "I had fainted, *unless I had believed* to see the good-

ness of the Lord in the land of the living. *Wait* on the Lord; be of *good courage*, and he shall strengthen thine heart : *wait*, I say, on the Lord." This was his own walk, when he cried, "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy water spouts." "Yet," saith he, rallying his faith and confidence in God, "yet the Lord will command his loving kindness in the day-time, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life. I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? Why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As with a sword in my bones mine enemies reproach me, while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God? Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God, for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

On the other hand the soul of the believer has its seasons of pleasant communion with God; not without variation, even at the best; still, considering what a heart he has, and what a world he lives in, sufficient to fill him with gratitude and joy. Ordinances are not always unprofitable; prayer is not always languid: his spirit can rise at times to the lively contemplation of God, and can call him, *My God*; can taste his love in Christ, and feel the refreshings of his grace, and triumph in the prospect of future glory. God breaks to him the bread of life at his table, and he feeds on Christ indeed: he dwelleth in God, and God in him. He has a sense of his presence, and confesses his fulfilment of this word of his grace, "I will be to them a God." O how ineffably poor do all other delights appear, at sea-

sons like these! How does the flame of holy affection towards God burn bright and strong in the happy soul! especially if they come (as they sometimes do) after much coldness, and deadness of spirit in religion. God is pleased to quicken us anew: the heart is warmed, ere it be aware, and caught away from earth and sense, by some pleasant meditation on divine truth, known indeed before, but now felt in power. The sweet breath of spiritual influences has reached the becalmed soul, and it spreads all its sail, and rides on swiftly, over the troubled sea of life, towards the haven of everlasting rest.

Now all this, I say, is purely Christian experience. Talk of such things to the most strict religious professor, the man in whose heart Christ has never been revealed, through the Spirit,—he knows not what you mean; he abhors the mention of such affections? he has no spiritual fellowship with God.

But, of the believer in Jesus, God has said, “I will be to him a God;” and therefore he comes down *into his very heart*, to make good his word. This is repeatedly declared, in Scripture, as true of *each* of the persons of the Godhead; inasmuch as the abiding of one is necessarily the abiding of all, who are, together, one undivided God. The Father and the Son dwell in believers through the Spirit, who is one with both, and proceeds from both, of his own will, to execute the purposes of divine mercy, in the souls of his people. Thus Christ promises his disciples, (John xiv. 16, 17,) “I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that *he* may *abide with you* for ever; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him

not, neither knoweth him : but ye know him, for he dwelleth with you, and shall *be in you.*" And this indwelling of the Spirit was *Christ's own indwelling*; as it follows in the next verse—"I will not leave you comfortless, *I will come* unto you." Further, as he teaches us only a few verses beyond, the *Father himself* was thus present, and abiding in the hearts of his people. (ver. 23.) "If a man love me, he will keep my words, and *my Father* will love him, and *we* will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

The *gracious* character of this abiding of God in the souls of believers is evident, from that sweet name given to the Spirit in this connexion,—“the Comforter.” Our Lord expresses it in a yet more familiar manner, “Behold,” saith he, “I stand at the door and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, *and will sup with him*, and he with me.” I will admit him to most pleasant and familiar intercourse with myself; feasting him with the choicest spiritual dainties, and myself enjoying, with him, the returns of his spiritual affection and holy love.

See, here, what is true religion. No gloomy, morose, cheerless thing, that *robs* us of real pleasure : but *the soul of pleasure* in the immediate enjoyment of God. “Truly,” saith the beloved disciple, “our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ: and these things write we unto you, *that your joy may be full.*” Pray, thus to have “*Christ in you*, the hope of glory:”—“that Christ may *dwell in your hearts by faith*; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend, with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and

height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God."

Two things are necessary for your enjoyment of this promise.

1. To realize God as *your* God ; and then,
2. To live on him in this character.

1. Realize this God as your God. Seek to have some comfortable assurance of your own *personal* interest in him. This you *may* have ; this you *must* have, if you would have any settled peace, any prevailing motives to withstand the temptations of an evil world. It is the folly of many that they are content to stop, in religion, short of this ; they deem it the privilege of a few only,—of some eminent saints, but, in general, unattainable. If we trace this evil to its root, much remaining love of the world, and want of spirituality of mind, will be found to be the cause of it. Men (and here I speak of those of whom we have some reason to hope well) are too soon satisfied : their desires are not eager after *growth* in divine things : they leave to others this intimate fellowship with God, and sure persuasion of an interest in him ; and do it *without regret*, because they think they can be *safe* without it. The consequence of this indifference and sloth is apparent in all their religious walk. There is no life or power in the truths they hold ; all is doubt and uncertainty as to the issue ; their religion is without comfort, without enjoyment ; and hence it is without a sanctifying effect upon the heart : they are tempted to turn away, for satisfaction, to present things : and if there be in them any spark of divine grace, it is

almost smothered, through life, by the rubbish with which it is enveloped.

My beloved brethren, you that hope you have some genuine acquaintance with the gospel of Christ, beware how you rest in this *middle walk* (as one well called it) between spirituality on the one hand, and entire worldliness on the other. Faith worketh by love, and love can never rest but in being loved again by the object of it. Many a sorrow will it add to a dying hour, to leave this great question, Am I a child of God? unsettled till then. I grant, indeed, that assurance is not so of the essence of faith, as that there can be no faith where it is wanting. This all experience contradicts. But *to live at ease* while we know not our interest in God—to *be contented* with ignorance, on a point like this, on which hangs all that is precious in time and eternity, is, surely, evidence of a spirit grievously under the deadening influence of a world that knows not God.

But to speak a little to the point of assurance, as attainable by the Christian in this life. We have admitted that faith may be, where assurance is not. Faith is that simple act of the soul whereby it credits God's testimony of his Son; and with this faith is inseparably connected salvation. "*Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.*" The question, Is Christ's salvation mine? or, Am I a child of God? or, Am I one of God's elect? (for they are all the same,) resolves itself into this, Do I believe? For God's people were "chosen from the beginning unto salvation, through sanctification of the Spirit, *and belief of the truth.*" "Ye are all the *children of God*

by faith in Christ Jesus.” If I have really taken God at his word, and embraced the mercy proposed to me in his Son, it is thereby mine; and, further, a *conviction* that I have so done is necessary, to beget in me a comfortable *persuasion* that it is mine. Such a persuasion there cannot be, without a *consciousness*, by the soul, *of its own act* of believing. Now, it must be quite clear, that the faith itself by which I am saved, and the perception, by my own mind, of the existence of that faith, are *distinct* acts; and to confound the two is highly injurious; for it makes salvation to depend, not upon the soul’s believing in Christ, but upon believing something about itself, namely, that it does so believe.

As faith and assurance are *separable*, in themselves, so they are often *actually separated* in experience. Indeed, to keep the souls of believers from this sweet and establishing persuasion of their interest in God is the continual effort of the powers of darkness. Satan is a malignant foe. The *life* of the believer is hid with Christ in God, and he cannot touch it; but he *can* molest, and break his peace: he can bring up a cloud over the soul, and darken its evidences for heaven. The experience of the Christian is of a very *mixed* character; and he is not always able to come to a correct or unquestionable conclusion respecting it. Some things in him, he hopes, argue faith; other things, alas! are evident tokens of unbelief. He considers the deceitfulness above all things of the human heart; the manifold outbreakings of a corrupt nature; and he is afraid to pronounce confidently as to the reality of a work of grace within. “What,” saith the

enemy, "Are you a Christian? Look what a heart you have. Look at your cold desires, your wandering thoughts, your lifeless services. Faith worketh by love. Grace makes all things new. Where is this in you? You are but deceiving yourself: a stony-ground hearer; a dead branch, without any root in Christ." And often the poor tempted soul subscribes to all this. Much of it is true; and instead of rejoicing in the all-sufficiency of Jesus' righteousness, and answering all these charges by *believing again* on him for salvation, which would quench these fiery darts in an instant, the man is ready to give up in despair—to conclude that he knows nothing of God, nor has any interest in him. Satan has taken him off, now, from the simple ground of assurance, namely, faith in Christ, to his own varying experience; and when the man has his eye on this, for hope, instead of Christ, he will be, "like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind, and tossed."

But this painful experience, in the want of assurance, is a very different thing from that of the man who sits down *satisfied* in the want of it. This the truly gracious soul cannot do. It must have some liberty to call God its own God, ere it can be at peace; and this desire is never created, but, sooner or later, more or less, God satisfies it. The assurance of faith is no such rare thing as many suppose. The early Christians lived in the full enjoyment of it, and are everywhere appealed to as so doing, and exhorted to preserve it. (See Heb. x. 34, 35. 1 Pet. i. 8, 9, and v. 1. 1 John v. 13.) And there are few, in *these* days, who are truly living to God, but have their measure of it, except in some particular seasons of temptation. They

have a *hope*, at least; and this hope lives, and grows, and brings forth fruit to God; and these fruits, again, evidence the genuineness of faith, and so *advance* that hope to assurance in the soul. Hence St. John repeatedly adduces them as proofs, whereby we may know our interest in God. (1 John ii. 3, 5; and iii. 14, 19, 24; and iv. 13.) And when the Spirit of God is pleased to shine upon his own work, the truth of it is seen, and known, and cannot but be rejoiced in; not as confirming the foundation of our acceptance with God, but as confirming that we are on it.

This joy of the Lord is our strength. Bring temptation before such a man. What, saith he, am I a child of God, and shall I not walk worthy of this high relation? Am I an heir of glory, and shall the poor base trifles of a perishing world seem great in my eyes? O beloved, if you would endure afflictions, if you would overcome the world and the flesh, or triumph against spiritual enemies, put on "for an helmet this hope of salvation:" seek to realize God as *your* God. This, and nothing less, will *fix* your froward affections, and keep you steadfast unto the end. Hence, God, consulting with himself how he shall bring back his wanderers, and *retain* them in obedience, represents himself as selecting this expedient—giving them this assurance of adoption, (Jer. iii. 19:) "I said, How shall I put thee among the children, and give thee a pleasant land, a goodly heritage of the hosts of nations? and I said, *Thou shalt call me, my Father, and shalt not turn away from me.*"

Here is the sweetness of that acquaintance with God which the true believer has. The more he learns of

God, the more he learns of his own riches, his own blessedness. Whatever he finds in him, it is all *his own*, because he has said, I will be *to them* a God. The faith of this truth draws out the affections (as well it may) towards him. "O God," saith David, "thou art *my* God." With this he sets out, as an ascertained truth—a truth which could alone give life and energy to all his religion. "O God, thou art my God." And what then? "Early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth after thee." So when God would awaken in us any spiritual affections, he touches this same string; exhibits himself in this relation. "The Lord is King for ever, even *thy* God, O Zion, unto all generations." "Say unto them," saith Jesus to Mary, when he would send a message of comfort by her to his disciples, "I ascend unto my Father, *and your* Father, and to my God, and *your* God." All the joy of pardon centres here. It is the very first sweetness that the pardoned sinner tastes in religion, that he can *now* look up to God, that God who was before arrayed in frowns, and call him, Abba, Father, *my* God, reconciled *to me* in Christ.

It may be said, perhaps, that this is *selfish* love of God, when we love him because of the interest we have in him: but it is that self-love with which God created us; that self-love, the loss of which has been the destruction of the soul of man. If God delight in his own perfections, it is from the sense which he has of what they are to him, what he is, as possessing them. And if a creature delight in them, it must be in like manner, from the possession of *some interest* in them. Certainly, there can be no sweetness in the contemplation

of them, apart from this. To desire to possess God as a God *to us*, and to delight in him *as ours*, is the purest, noblest affection of a human being.

Would you, then, have this God, beloved, as *your* God? He *is* yours, if you are only suing out the mercy of this covenant of grace, through Christ. The promise of my text rests (with all the other) on that, "I will be merciful to their unrighteousness." If you are bold to *believe* in Christ, and to plead the merit of his work for mercy to you as a sinner, then be bold to take this assurance along with it. God hath joined them together, let no man put them asunder. And if you would *know more* that you are a child of God, then *believe more*. Put forth the *actings* of spiritual life, and this will dispel all doubts as to the *reality* of it in you. The paralytic whom Jesus healed could not doubt of his cure, when he took up his bed, and walked; and so it is, mainly, in *the exercise* of faith, that the soul gets the *assurance* of faith. Claim the relation of a child; live as if you were one; and God will so *own* the relation, that you can hesitate no longer. Let me, then, say to you,

2. Live on God as a God to you—And this in two ways. (1) Live on him for all your need: (2) Live on him for all your happiness. Under this twofold aspect God revealed himself to Abraham, (Gen. xii. 1,) for the encouragement of his faith, in the long-continued trial of it. "Fear not, Abram; I am thy *shield*, and thy exceeding great *reward*:"—thy safety and thy happiness.

(1) *Live on God for all your need*. Whatever it be, want, or difficulty, or danger, temporal or spiritual,

take it to God. "He hath said, I will *never* leave thee, nor forsake thee ; so that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me." (Heb. xiii. 5, 6.) Unbounded is the encouragement given us by God to live on him as our sufficiency; to make over to him every anxiety. "Casting *all your care* upon him, for he careth for you." "Be careful *for nothing* ; but in *every thing*, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, make your requests known unto God." "Take *no thought* (no *μέριμνα*, anxious, fretting solicitude) for the morrow. Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat, or, What shall we drink, or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed ?" And why not ? "*For your heavenly Father knoweth* that ye have need of all these things." O may he teach you and me, beloved, to live this pleasant life of faith upon him : to say, and be content in saying, under all our wants, My Father knows ; my God will supply all my need, according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

I shall have all things, and abound,
If God be God to me.

The same is true of *spiritual* necessities : your supply is in God. You have this lesson beautifully taught you by our blessed Lord, (John xv.) He there shows his people how he will be a God to them ; and how is this ? He makes himself their *root* and they are *his branches* : and he assures them, (ver. 4, 5,) "As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can ye, except ye abide in me. . . . For without me ye can do nothing." It is not *from* him, so much as *in* him, that the believer has all his grace, wisdom,

strength, holiness, and joy: just in the same way as the branch finds all its life and fruitfulness in its living root. To his latest hour the believer has nothing of his own, any more than when he first trusted in Christ. The Spirit of Christ abides in him ; and whatever be the multiplied streams of grace that refresh and fertilize his soul, the Spirit is, itself, that "living water" in him, "springing up unto everlasting life." Then the soul lives indeed, when it learns thus to "rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."

So, again, in seasons of danger. "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous runneth into it, and is safe." This God must be all your confidence, while you are yet in an enemy's country, and yourselves weak, ignorant, and foolish ; liable to be insnared or overpowered by a host of adversaries. Your sufficiency lies not in any past experience, so that you should build on that for victory, in present and future conflicts. "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool." Your sufficiency lies in this—that God is pledged to be a God to you. "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms; and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee, and shall say, Destroy them." This is no mere poetical imagery, without reality. His saints can speak of him, *from experience*, in this character. Hear David, for instance, looking back upon his deliverances from the hand of Saul. "The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strength, in whom I will trust ; my buckler, and the horn of my salvation, and my high tower." God was, himself, all this to him; not merely *gave* him a defence,

but *was himself* his defence ; and David, in the exercise of faith, knew it, and triumphed, as you see, in the knowledge of it.

Further, is it a time of trial with you ? an evil day—a day of heaviness through manifold afflictions ? Is God loosening the cords of your earthly tabernacle ? and are you in bondage through fear of death ? Count God as the God of all that grace which is specially suited to bring you through. You may see, again, what I mean, in David. He found sensible tokens of decaying nature. “My flesh and my heart faileth,” he says. What does he, hereupon ? He contemplates God in this special character,—*the strength of his heart*. The world was fast receding. Well, he saith, I can part with it. I have a better heritage. “God is the strength of my heart, and *my portion* for ever.” Now, beloved, you who know David’s God, look upon him as being the same to you. Go to him with the promise of my text, and, in the prayer of faith, expect its fulfilment. He may not be a God to you, exactly in the *season*, or in the *manner* you propose. You will be sure to find abundant room for faith, it may be, of great faith, while God seems to leave you to the cruel one, to the strength of indwelling corruption, or the floods of creature sorrow. But “they shall not be ashamed that *wait* for him.” “When thou passest through the waters I will be with thee, and through the rivers they shall not overflow thee : when thou walkest through the fire thou shalt not be burned ; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.”

2. *Live on God for happiness*: and this, for time, and for eternity.

For time. Many are content that God should be their happiness in *another* world, who will not take him as such *in this*. Here they have other objects of pursuit, which engross their time, and captivate their affections. They want not God. Their service is for what they may get *from him*, not for what they find *in him*. They are ever setting up this or that vanity, idolizing the creature, and saying to it, Thou shalt be a god to me, while they turn away from the uncreated spring of blessedness. So God complains of his people by the prophet, (Jer. ii. 13,) "My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." And alas! the foolish hearts, even of his own children, are ever prone to do the same—to look elsewhere for satisfying good, and set their affections upon that which is not. Many a rod, brethren, which falls heavy upon you, in the providence of God, brings this message along with it, "I will be to you a God." Give not your affections to the creature, instead of me. Go not to the muddy streams, the cloying, polluting, dying pleasures of this vain world: believe not its distempered dream of happiness, but seek it in me, and you shall be happy indeed. In this way, as well as by direct communications of himself in goodness to the soul, sweetly rivetting its affections, and charming it away from all created good, does God teach his people to take him as their all,—their present, as well as their everlasting portion. "The Lord (saith David) is the portion of mine inheritance, and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot. The lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places, yea,

I have a goodly heritage.” “Whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.”

This deliberate choice the renewed soul makes of God as its chief, its only good. The man lives on God *for happiness*; finds all his enjoyment in the vision of him, and converse with him, through faith, and joyfully forsakes for him all that the world can offer. This was beautifully prefigured by the ordinance of God respecting the sons of Levi. (Num. xviii. 20.) “Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land: neither shalt thou have any part among them: *I am thy part, and thine inheritance*, among the children of Israel.” (Compare Josh. xiii. 33.) Herein they were a type of the “royal priesthood,” the holy nation, redeemed to God out of the world, and set apart for his peculiar service. They find their all in God, while carnal professors are content with their earthly portion; and as long as life and its pleasures may last, have no wish for any thing beyond.

O beloved, be not you so satisfied. Thank God, indeed, for his gifts; but let no one of them content you, beneath himself. The *world* has *these* from him: as we read of Abraham’s sons by his concubines—“he gave them gifts, and sent them away:” but he reserved *the inheritance* for Isaac. So it is with God. He scatters his *providential* blessings, with a profuse hand, upon the evil and the good; but his best, his *reserved* gift, for his spiritual children, is himself. Go, then, no more after the world and its deceits. “Come out,” saith God, in connexion with this very promise, “and be separate, and touch not the unclean

thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty." Be persuaded of this promise, and embrace it; confess that you are strangers and pilgrims upon earth; that it has nothing you want; nothing you can set your heart upon; that you "desire a better country, even a heavenly." So shall that word be fulfilled in you, "Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called *their* God, for he hath prepared for them a city." And this leads our thoughts into the heavenly world; and teaches us, lastly, to live on God as our happiness,

For eternity. An everlasting God must be an everlasting portion to them of whom he says, I will be their God; and so David calls him, "My portion *for ever*." "Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and *after that* receive me to glory." Behold here, brethren, the infinite superiority of your inheritance above the fairest heritage of the men of this world. "The things which are seen are temporal; the things which are not seen are eternal." The world, indeed, ridicule your expectations and pity your folly, in abandoning the good they are pursuing; but *you* know it is *they* who are to be pitied: they are spending money for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not: it is "bread that perisheth." Vanity, uncertainty, disappointment, and death, is stamped upon it all. Not so with your portion: it is a treasure in the heavens that faileth not—an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved there for you, and you kept for it. (1 Pet. i. 5.) Yea, the everlasting God himself is your

exceeding great reward : that God of whom it is witnessed, "With thee is the *fountain of life*." (Ps. xxxvi. 9.) "In thy presence is *fulness of joy*, and at thy right hand there are pleasures *for evermore*." (Ps. xvi. 11.) O that these things were believed by us ! All the bliss of all worlds is only as drops from the uncreated spring of it in the blessed God. "Now," saith God, contemplating all this fulness in himself, "I will be a God *to thee* ! I will make thee drink of the river of my pleasures." Not pleasures merely, but, *my* pleasures, my own perfect, infinite, everlasting bliss ! O thirst for this true, this never failing happiness, these overflowing fountains of eternal delights that are in God, your God.

The believer, even here, has a little foretaste of this spiritual blessedness—some grapes of Eshcol, the fruits of that blessed land on which his affections are set. Even "now are we the sons of God." The Spirit is in us to seal us for glory, and is the present *earnest* of it in our hearts. God is revealed, even here, in a way that only his people know ; and the sight of him fills them with holy transport, and ineffable desire. But, after all, the largest discoveries of him are as darkness, the clearest conceptions of him foolishness, compared with the vision of him as he is, in the world of glory. "Now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face : now we know in part ; but then shall we know even as also we are known."

How should the believer in Jesus live above the things of this passing world, and fix his thoughts and affections on these glorious realities of eternity ! The God of eternity has said to him, I am thy God, even

thine. In this grant he has all things. He is "*heir of God*;" coming in, by right of sonship, to all that is his Father's. "He that overcometh," (saith Christ,) "*shall inherit all things* ; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son." How light should tribulations appear in the apprehension of these glorious truths ! how should the prospect of eternal glory quite swallow up all inferior anxieties, and cause the believer to be only concerned for this, that, "whether present or absent, he may be accepted of him."

Lift up your heads, for your redemption draweth nigh. The day when it shall be said, "Lo, this *is our God* ; we have waited for him, and he will save us : this is the Lord : we have waited for him : we will be glad, and rejoice, in his salvation."

DIVINE RELATIONSHIP.

(CONCLUDED)

HEBREWS viii. 10.—*I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.*

THE former part of this promise we have already considered ; wherein God engages himself to be a God to those on whose unrighteousness he has mercy. But he engages for *more* than this. He was a God by covenant to Israel of old ; but “their heart was not right with him, neither were they *steadfast* in his covenant.” Indeed they were continually departing from it ; till at length, by their rejection of the promised Messiah, they provoked God utterly to dissolve all relation between himself and them ; and to say of them, as he had signified by the prophet, (Hos. i. 9,) “Lo—ammi ; ye are not my people, and I will not be your God.”

But in this better covenant now established with the Christian church, and hereafter to be confirmed with the seed of Israel, (according to the testimony of the same prophet, immediately following, “In the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there shall it be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God,”) in this covenant of grace, God does more than promise, as respects *himself* alone : he engages *for men also*, the other party in the covenant. He pledges himself for *their* continuance in it. It is one that shall never be broken, as the former was, by their

wilful violation of it ; provoking God finally to cast them away, and disown the relationship. It runs not, I will be to them a God, *so long as*, or, *provided that*, they be to me a people. We meet not here, as in the old covenant, with continual warnings and threatenings, lest, by our own perverseness and folly, we forfeit all its benefits ; or with such terms as those, (Ex. xix. 5,) “*If ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure to me, above all people.*” But, as God says of himself, “*I will—I will be to them a God ;*” so, also, he says of them, “*They shall—they shall be to me a people.*”

It is a provision of this perfect covenant, wherein all spiritual blessings are made over, no less *surely*, than freely, to the heirs of promise, that God’s power, wisdom and goodness, shall effectually work together, to overcome all difficulties and opposition, in the way—first, of establishing, and then of maintaining to the end, this blessed relationship between himself and them. Whether these difficulties arise from the power and subtlety of spiritual enemies from without, or from the strength of natural depravity in the hearts of his children,—let what will stand in the way to prevent, God declares, “I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people.”

Let us consider, then, in humble dependence upon God for his teaching and blessing,

I. This relation of redeemed sinners to their God.

II. God’s own engagement to establish it.

And may he give to each of us, brethren, some pleasant experience of their truth ! bringing us, through

his Spirit, into loving fellowship with himself in Christ, and keeping us in it, according to this his revealed purpose and covenant promise.

This relation of redeemed sinners to their God
“They shall be to me a people.”

Such was Israel among the nations of the earth. Viewed according to their profession and engagements, and compared with the rest of the nation, they were a people singularly devoted to the service of the true God. The laws which they had were given them by God himself: they lived under his immediate protection. his temple was, as it were, his court of audience, where he dwelt in the midst of them, and they had liberty of access to him, according to the ceremonial prescribed by himself.

Now, in all this, they were an eminent type of that spiritual people, the *true* seed of Abraham, (Rom. ix. 8,) whose relation to God is the subject of the present promise. *They* are, in the *highest* sense, “a peculiar treasure unto him, above all the people of the earth.” They are distinguished from all the world besides, by the favour of God, and their connexion and intimate fellowship with him; having “boldness to enter *into the holiest*, by the blood of Jesus.” They are, spiritually, what Israel was outwardly, “a people saved by the Lord;” “a people near unto him.” They are the subjects of his kingdom—a kingdom set up, not in any earthly territory, but in their hearts and affections:—a kingdom characterized, not by meats and drinks, and carnal ordinances, but by “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost;” a kingdom securing to

them, not merely *temporal* privileges, of protection and blessing, but deliverance from all *spiritual* evils, the rich enjoyment of God as their God, by faith, in time, and the fruition of his glory, in the uninterrupted vision of him as he is, throughout eternity.

Such is the relationship which is intended in this expression, "a people unto God." May the Lord, beloved, fulfil it in our hearts! numbering us among those "whose God is the Lord, the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance!"

The words before us may be regarded under a two-fold aspect: either as expressing the special *regard which God has to his people*, choosing them and rejoicing in them as such; or, the *regard which they have to God*; acknowledging him to be theirs, and yielding themselves to him in entire and willing obedience, as their Lord and God. "I will say, Thou art my people, and they shall say, Thou art my God."

We may take up the promise under consideration, then, in both these points of view:—1. His people owning God as theirs. 2. God owning them as his.

1. *His people owning God as theirs.* "They shall be my people:" that is, they shall so demean themselves: their spirit and deportment among men shall witness for them that they stand to me in this relation; that they account themselves mine indeed, while others are saying, "Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways."

We may specify four unquestionable marks by which the people of God evidence this relation to him; and whereby they that are such may assure themselves, again, of his eternal foreknowledge and choice of them^{at}

so to be, "holy, and without blame before him, in love."

- (1.) They yield themselves to his authority.
- (2.) They separate themselves from an evil world.
- (3.) They devote themselves to his service.
- (4.) They live on him for protection and happiness.

(1.) *They yield themselves to his authority.* It is the great sin of fallen man, that he thinks and acts as if he were an *independent* being. He settles for himself his rule of conduct towards God, and towards his fellow creatures, as if he had nothing to consult but the choice of his own will, and the dictates of his own corrupt understanding. There is no more glaring proof of this entire disregard of the divine authority, than the way in which men have inverted the standard of moral good and evil. Sins *against society* are, with them, of the *first* order: the *only* sins to which they attach any real criminality, or opprobrium. But as to offences purely against God,—as indifference to religion, neglect of God's Sabbath, irreverent use of that holy name by which we are called,—these are of little or no magnitude in their eyes. A man may be habitually guilty of them all his days, and yet have the praise of a godless world, as being every thing that is virtuous and excellent.

Set before such a man the perfect law of God; bring home to his conscience its demands of love to God, with all his heart, and mind, and soul, and strength,—instead of implicit acquiescence in this holy commandment, as the expression of his will who is his rightful Sovereign and Lord, immediately he objects to its strictness; loathes obedience to it; indignantly denies

his desert of its curse; and proudly offers for eternal life, such a measure of obedience to it as he sees fit to render.

Now, in the place of all this, they who are to God a people have been taught to bow their once stubborn will in submission to his sovereign authority. They account it most reasonable to give up themselves in entire obedience to him, whose they are. They realize his glory and their meanness: his awful majesty, his infinite perfections; and their nothingness as creatures, their vileness as sinners. But, especially, they realize his right over them, who, when their very being was forfeited to the righteous judgment of God, gave himself for their ransom;—that, *for love's sake*, they might, henceforth, yield themselves, unreservedly, to his most blessed rule. “For *to this end* Christ both died, and rose, and revived, *that he might be Lord* both of the dead and living.”

Indeed, that a being so ignorant, so feeble, as man, should ever *wish* to be his own master,—that he should ever dream of being a law unto himself, and count it happiness to be free from God, and acting contrary to him, argues, of itself, the most desperate madness of a diseased and darkened mind. “All they,” saith Christ, “that hate me, love death.” (Prov. viii. 36.) And, if it appear folly, on the face of it, much more will it appear so, when viewed in the light of experience, by those who have been taught of God to understand what was their real condition, when they were far off from him. Unregenerate men may think it bondage to submit to God: they may account it a mark of a pitiful spirit to fear God, and to tremble at

his judgments; but every renewed man knows, that he was far indeed from freedom, while he was at a distance from God, and refusing subjection to him. While he set at naught the favour and frown of God, he was held in rigorous subjection to the vain opinion, the fleeting breath of censure, or praise, of his fellow men. He was the slave of cruel and debasing lusts; the sport of evil passions; the victim of selfish desires, habits, and tempers, which he could in no way control. He resolved against them in vain: they led him captive at the will of him who works in the children of disobedience.

From all this grace has set the people of God free. They are now "obedient children, not fashioning themselves according to the former lusts, in their ignorance, but, as he which hath called them is holy, so are they holy, in all manner of conversation." That promise of the covenant is fulfilled in them, "I will put my laws in their mind, and write them in their hearts." They obey, indeed; but it is no longer a base and selfish lust; or, rather, an endless variety of them, all warring within for their several gratifications, and making them "like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest." The believer obeys the "living and true God;" and he can from his heart say, "Thy service is perfect freedom." He can compare, *from experience*, as no worldly man can, the service of God and the service of the world; and though, through the power of an evil nature, he cannot yet triumph in *complete* deliverance from former lusts, yet the entire subjection of his own will to God is that he desires, and aims at, as the perfection of happiness. "O (saith he) that my

ways were directed to keep thy statutes! Then shall I not be ashamed, when I have respect unto *all* thy commandments.” “Other lords beside thee have had dominion over me, but *by thee only* will I make mention of thy name.” Thus the people of the Lord yield themselves to his authority, disallow the actings of their own depraved inclinations, and acknowledge no will, no rule of conduct, but his alone. My brethren, how is this with you? Never can you be *saved* by Christ, if you be not under the *yoke* of Christ. Are there any who refuse so to be? He calls them *his enemies*. “Those mine enemies, *which would not that I should reign* over them, bring them hither, and slay them before me.” (Luke xix. 27.) Inquire, then, of yourselves, Am I thus yielding myself to the Lord? Is his law that by which I am ordering my spirit and conduct? “Lord,” said the proud persecutor, the instant that divine grace touched his heart, (and it is the language of every heart into which divine grace finds entrance,) “Lord, *what wilt thou have me to do?*” Reflect, for a moment, what is the bliss of angels and archangels; those happy spirits, that excel in all the glory of holiness and goodness. From age to age they “do his commandment, hearkening to the voice of his word.” And are *they* without understanding? Is there meanness in *their* spirits? Is it any *small* excellence in Jehovah that brings those exalted beings, themselves radiant in glory, on their faces before God? O may the Lord affect our minds with these considerations! May he dispose us to yield ourselves to his authority, and from our inmost souls to say, “Hallowed be *thy* name, *thy* will be done.”

(2.) *They separate themselves from an evil world.*

From the beginning, ever since men began "to call upon (or rather to be called by) the name of the Lord," has a distinction existed between the church and the world,—the sons of God and the sons of men. (Gen. iv. 26, and vi. 2.) But it was more peculiarly marked in God's separation of Israel, as a people, to himself. "*Get thee out of thy country,*" said he to Abraham, the father of that people, "and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee." He could not serve God acceptably, but by breaking connexion with all that had hitherto been dear to him. When he arrived in Canaan, "by faith he sojourned in it as in a strange country;" he confessed himself "a stranger and a pilgrim on the earth," who had no wish to settle in it. When Jacob, in after-times, went down into Egypt, Joseph, though high in the court of Pharaoh, studiously avoided the promotion of his brethren, and so the *blending* of his people with the Egyptians. "When Pharaoh shall call you, and shall say, What is your occupation? ye shall say, Thy servants' trade hath been about cattle from our youth." And why say so? "For every shepherd is *an abomination* to the Egyptians." (Gen. xlv. 33, 34.) Thus he took effectual means, pursuant to the purpose of God, for drawing a line of separation between the Egyptians and Israel. Follow them in their history; this feature of it is still the same. They must *go out of Egypt* to sacrifice; and in the wilderness they receive of God, statutes and ordinances, which were expressly intended to be a "*wall of partition*" between them and the nations. "I am the

Lord your God, which have *separated you from other people*. . . . And ye shall be holy unto me, for I the Lord am holy: and have *severed you from other people*, that ye should be mine." (Lev. xx. 24. 26.) Accordingly, God, by the mouth of Balaam, selects this as characteristic of them. "Lo, the people *shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations*." (Num. xxiii. 9.) And to this very hour, amidst all the vicissitudes of that extraordinary people, has this prophecy been accurately accomplished.

The same is true, in a still higher sense, of God's *spiritual* people. Whatever was once their connexion with a world that "lieth in wickedness," they are now distinguished from it, in the whole tenor of their pursuits, and current of their affections. They accord not with its sentiments; they have no longer a relish for its pleasures; they affect not its society, its honours, its wealth, its grandeur. They will have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them, whatever be the specious names under which their deformity may be veiled. Do any ask, What has wrought the change? We answer, Belief of the truth. "This is the victory that *overcometh the world*, even our *faith*." They believe, what others will not, that "if any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." That the "friendship of the world is enmity with God." That "Christ died for us," for this very end, "that he might *deliver us from this present evil world*." O that men who call themselves Christians, yea, some who surname themselves the people of God, would consider this! It was *not* the *heathen world*, but the Jewish world, unconverted

professors of the true religion, of which Jesus testified "that the works thereof were evil." (John vii. 7.) And this testimony is equally true of the Christian world, so called; the great mass of which have nothing of Christianity beyond the name and outward forms of it. Their ways, and God's ways, are as opposite as light and darkness, Christ and Belial, heaven and hell: the two are utterly irreconcilable. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon."

Further, the child of God believes a "judgment to come," of this world, when "the wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the people *that forget God*;" and, therefore, knowing the terrors of the Lord, like Noah, he is busied, not as others, with eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, but in working out his own salvation: like Lot, he flees out of Sodom, content to leave all he once valued behind;—to *lose* his life (as men count it) in this world, if he may but find it in life eternal.

But it is not only, or chiefly, the *warnings* and *threatenings* of God that prevail with the Christian to forsake the world. He has heard that *gracious* voice of God speaking to him in his word, and saying, "I will be to you a God." And this promise he is persuaded of, and has embraced. This does more than *drive* him—it *draws* him with cords of love—attracts him from those "dry places" in which hitherto he has been "seeking rest and finding none," and gives him rest in God. Once let God be known in this sweet character, and the world has lost its *ascendancy* for ever: and therefore the infinite wisdom of God, ever grounding his precepts upon motives that shall be *suf-*

ficient for obedience, first sets this blessedness before us, "I will dwell in you, and walk in you, and will be your God," and, then, knowing his advantage, (so to speak,) he presses home upon us that reasonable appeal, "*Wherefore*, come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing." (2 Cor. vi. 17.)

And this, let me observe, presents the character of Christian separation from the world in its true light. It is *not a mere coming out*—an abstaining from certain amusements or customs of the world, because *others* do ; or because we have, *naturally*, but little taste for them ; but a separation *of heart* : many part with it, outwardly, who yet hanker after something they have left in it ; and many, who so leave it for a time, go back, in the hour of temptation, more greedily than ever, and "the latter end is worse with them than the beginning." But the believer *loves not* the world. Mark this. His *affections* are set free : and the reason is, God has said to him, "I will be to thee a God." O the sweetly constraining influence of that word of promise, believed and embraced indeed ! "Come," saith the believer, "return unto *thy rest*, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee !" If Pharaoh could say to Jacob, Regard not thy stuff ; for the good of all the land of Egypt is yours,—well may God say to his people, Regard not thy stuff ; look not at what you leave : grieve not for the pleasures of sin for a season,—for the good of all the heavenly land, yea, the God of heaven himself is thine, thy portion, thy possession for ever ! My brethren, is it *a sacrifice*, think you, to the believer, to part with the world, when he

realizes this truth of God? On the contrary, hear Paul, thus appealing to the saints of old ; “Ye took *joyfully* the *spoiling* of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have, in heaven, a better and an enduring substance.” Surely that word, “Come out and be separate,” once so harsh in the ears, is now as music ; as the call to one who has been long in fetters and a dungeon, Come out, be free. May the Lord make the pleasures of a sinful world thus *distasteful* to our souls ! May he enable us to say, “Our *πολίτευμα*, our citizenship is in heaven, whence we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus.” (Phil. iii. 20.)

But there is more in this separation from the world, than the standing aloof from its society, and its pleasures. The believer is called to abstain, not from *some* things, only, that are evil in it, but from *all* that is evil. There is far more of the world clings to us, than we are aware. It has its evil tempers, its selfishness, its covetousness, its corrupt affections of every kind, which degrade men, and embitter the intercourse of social life : and there are many who come out willingly enough from its vanities, who yet bring *these* evils along with them. The world, however they allow such dispositions in themselves, are keen-eyed to detect, and quick to expose, this inconsistency, in the followers of Jesus. And it is the glory of the Christian, so to *adorn* the gospel, by a holy and lovely deportment, as to “put to silence the ignorance of foolish men ;” to shame them “who falsely accuse his good conversation in Christ.” But when evil tempers are indulged, when Christians are selfish, and interested in their views, and greedy of gain, like other men, the world’s

accusation, however malignant, is *not* false. Then God is blasphemed, spiritual religion is counted a pretence, and a blot and reproach is cast upon the holy doctrine of the gospel, by those who are glad to stumble at the failings of its professors.

Ever bear in mind, then, beloved, what is *true* separation from an evil world : not that which lies merely in the outward act, but *in spirit*. Do you find it hard to exercise these heavenly graces, to which a meek and holy Saviour calls you ? Who does not ? Who, of your brethren, does not mourn in secret, over his manifold failures in this blessed duty ? They are fruits, not of nature, but of the Spirit. (Gal. v. 22.) Wait upon him, then, with earnest entreaty to root out of you every vile affection. In *his* strength strive to put forth the graces of the Christian character. "Add to your faith virtue, and to virtue knowledge, and to knowledge temperance, and to temperance patience, and to patience godliness, and to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins." Further, let me say, if you would attain to this beauty of holiness, often contemplate that great example, God's love *toward you*. Think what he has done for you : think what he says to you : "I will be to you a God." When you realize this relation, you will find a sweet calm brought into your spirit—a holy elevation of soul above the passing interests of time and sense. Nothing,

like this, will kill sin, and sweeten the natural bitterness of your heart. You will “put on, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, gentleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering.” You will be “blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom ye shine, as lights in the world.” Mark, now, a third characteristic of the people of God.

(3.) *They devote themselves to his service.* This is the duty of every loyal subject to his prince ; and it is counted his honour, if he be personally called upon to testify his affection, and zeal, by some considerable sacrifices in his service. Herein, also, they who are a people to God are eminently distinguished. They not only bow to his authority, and fear before him,—not only separate themselves from an evil world, but they devote themselves, body, soul, and spirit, unto God ; consecrate to him every faculty and talent they possess. Other persons may give God much of their time, and toil, in the exercise of heartless devotion, from a principle of dread, and a desire of safety, but these give him *their all*. They make *no reserves* of love and obedience : there is nothing joined with God, that they will serve *along with him*—as it is said of some, “They feared the Lord, and served their own gods.” (2 Kings xvii. 33.) In this the hearts of God’s people are perfect before him, that they want none beside him. They have refused the world and its lusts, and are engaged in a continual warfare against them for their Divine Master ; counting all “loss for Christ.” They aim to do all, even their most common actions, to his

glory. (1 Cor. x. 31. Col. iii. 17.) They love his people ; they seek to promote his kingdom ; and esteem reproach, and loss, and suffering for Christ, their glory and riches. (Heb. xi. 26.)

These are hard sayings to worldly minds. If they cannot be the people of God by something short of this, then farewell, for them, to all the privileges of this divine relationship. They willingly part with it, like Esau, for some morsel that may gratify the present cravings of an earthly and sensual appetite. The believer, too, has often a long and sharp struggle, before he attains to any comfortable measure of this gracious disposition ; but, as we shall presently see, the Lord, who has pledged himself to establish a covenant relation between him and his people, though he give them an humbling acquaintance with the depths of their own depravity and earthly-mindedness, never leaves them, till he have won their affections back to himself—till he have caused them to take him as their all, in time and eternity ; their friend, their rest, their portion, for ever. O, saith the believer, shall I not serve him, who has redeemed me with his own blood from such an abyss of woes ; hath saved me, by himself enduring my sorrows, my sins, my curse ; and who, having thus redeemed me, now lives to finish this mystery of his love, by interceding, and reigning for me, above. Thus “by the mercies of God,” he is recovered effectually to him. Lord, he says, thou hast been a God to me : behold, I am thine. Use me for thy service ; live in me, and let me live to thee, all my days, by the faith of thy Son. My thoughts, my affections, my time, my talents, whatever thou has given me, O receive

them back again; fill them with thyself, and make me thine for ever. Whether I live, I would live unto the Lord; or whether I die, I would die unto the Lord. Thou, O Jesus, crucified for me, art all my salvation and all my desire.

Thee to serve, and thee to know,
Constitute my bliss below;
Thee to see, and thee to love,
Constitute my bliss above.

Lord, it is not life to live,
If thy presence thou deny:
Lord, if thou thy presence give,
'Tis no longer death to die.

Let me but thyself possess,
Total sum of happiness!
Perfect bliss I then shall prove,
Heaven below, and heaven above.

Thus, my brethren, do the people of the Lord devote themselves to him, and delight in his service. Seek, I pray you, this engagement of your affections, this going forth of your hearts to him. Be not satisfied, as most are, that you are doing nothing *against* God; but ask yourselves day by day, What am I doing, what can I do *for* him? Give up yourselves, in absolute surrender, to live to him, with every power of mind and body that you possess. Be sure, there is no happy religion which comes short, at least, *of this aim*; and there can be no interruption of happiness, even in a world like this, where God is thus restored to his throne in the human heart. Rightly does the apostle ascribe the alienation of natural men from the sweet-

ness of this life of God in the soul, to “the *ignorance* that is in them.”

There is yet one more mark of God’s people, which will need but little comment, after what has been already said.

(4.) *They live on him for protection and happiness.* The subjects of a good governor look for these from the wisdom, power, and care of their prince; and, assuredly, they are not looked for in vain by the people of God. But we can do little more, at present, than refer you, for this characteristic, to the close of the last discourse, where we considered it as flowing immediately from the faith of that promise, “I will be to them a God.” This faith his people have: and, while others are busily seeking their safety and happiness in the creature, inquiring on every side, (and never finding,) Who will show us any good? while they turn away from the fountain of all good, “Lord,” saith the believer, “lift *thou* up the light of thy countenance upon me! *Thou* hast put gladness in *my* heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased.” Thou hast numbered me, through grace, among thy people; let me experience the support of thine arm: let thy angelic hosts minister for me in thy providence: “cover me with thy feathers, and under thy wings let me trust: let thy truth be my shield and buckler.” Grant me the sunshine of thy favour; be with me in death; and land me safe, where sins, and dangers, and wants, and enemies, are known no more.

O how blessed is this relation of redeemed sinners to their God! They are his people,—yielding themselves to his authority, separating themselves from an

evil world, devoting themselves to his service, and living upon him for protection and happiness. "The Lord God is a sun and shield : the Lord will give grace and glory : no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly. O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee !"

But there is another aspect under which these words may be viewed,—“ They shall be to me a people : ” that is, *I* will own *them* as such ; provide for them, commune with them, dwell among them, set my heart upon them, as being to me in this character. Consider,

2. *God owning them as his people.* The point which I have principally in view, under this head, is to show the *value* which God sets upon them, the unspeakable delight which he condescends to take in them, as such. This, if we look at it in its spring, originates, entirely, with himself. There is nothing in them that is amiable or desirable, for which God should so regard them, but as he himself puts it there. “ Only,” saith Moses, (warning Israel, who was a type of them, against this very fancy, that any superior merit in themselves had been the cause of the Lord’s goodness to them,) “ Only, *the Lord had a delight in thy fathers to love them*, and he chose their seed after them, even you, above all people, as it is this day.” (Deut. x. 15.) But view them as they are in Christ, washed in his blood, and renewed and beautified by his Spirit, and whatever they be in the eye of men, they are in the sight of God most precious. (Isa. xliii. 4.) Hence, with special reference to the price that has been given for their redemption, they are described,

(Eph. i. 14,) as “the purchased possession,”—and, as “the church of God which he hath purchased with his own blood.” So St. Peter calls them a “*peculiar* people,” or, *a people for a possession*, and St. Paul, again, the same, (Tit. ii. 14,) expressing, hereby, not so much the peculiarity and separateness of *their character* from the world, (though that be true, and deducible from it,) but, rather, God’s *peculiar property* in them, and consequent value which he sets upon them. “The Lord’s *portion* is his people ; Jacob is *the lot of his inheritance*.” (Deut. xxxii. 9.) So he speaks of Israel, (Exod. xix. 5, to which St. Peter refers, as above,) “Then ye shall be *a peculiar treasure* unto me, above all people.” The word is the same as that used in Mal. iii. 17, “They shall be mine, saith the Lord, in the day that I make up *my jewels*.” The original term, in all these places, is the same, and conveys the idea of property acquired at some great cost, and on which the highest possible value is placed by the possessor. Such are his saints to God. He gave for their redemption his well beloved, his only begotten Son ! They are “redeemed, not with corruptible things, . . . but with the *precious* blood of Christ !” And he sets a value upon them commensurate with that mighty ransom.

Look at the wonders which God wrought for Israel. He had said of them, “They shall be to me a people ;” and, having so resolved, see how he dealt towards them. “As an eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings, so the Lord alone did lead him, and there was no

strange god with him." (Deut. xxxii. 11.) He brought them forth out of Egypt with a mighty hand : there was not one feeble person among their tribes. He divided the sea, and caused them to pass through, and overwhelmed their enemies in the midst of it. In the daytime he led them with a cloud, and all the night through with a light of fire. He clave the rocks in the wilderness, and gave them drink, as out of the great depths. He rained down manna upon them, and they did eat, and he gave them of the corn of heaven. Thy raiment (Moses appeals to them) waxed not old, neither did thy foot swell these forty years. He gave them the lands of the heathen, and they inherited the labours of the people. (See Psalms lxxviii. and cv. Deut. viii. 4.)

My brethren, was this the way of God with Israel after the flesh, and shall he do less for his *spiritual* people? Impossible. Consider the terms of endearment under which he speaks of them. He calls them his children ; the sheep of his pasture, for whom the Shepherd bled. The union between them and Christ is described as a *marriage* union. Their love is the love of *espousals*. (Jer. ii. 2.) "My beloved is mine," saith the church, "and I am his." (Cant. ii. 16, and vi. 3.) "Thy Maker is thy husband," saith God, "the Lord of hosts is his name." (Isa. liv. 5.) Such is the preciousness of his purchased people in his eyes. Not one of them, even the meanest, (if mean there could be, for whom such a ransom has been paid,) shall ever be lost by him. Lost, do I say? No, beloved, nor lost sight of, for a single moment. We are often ready, judging by the outward appearance, to complain that

he has done so. “Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me. Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? yea, they may forget, yet will I not forget thee. Behold, I have *graven thee on the palms of my hands*: thy walls are continually before me.” (Isa. xlix. 14—16.) “In that day sing ye unto her, a vineyard of red wine. I the Lord do keep it. I will water it *every moment*: lest any hurt it, I will keep it *night and day*.” (Isa. xxiii. 2, 3.)

Thus does God own his people, take delight in them, communicate himself to them, and joy over them as his choice “jewels,” his “peculiar treasure.” Of all who lay hold, in faith, on this covenant of grace, and come to him, through Jesus, for the washing away of their sins through his blood, that word is sure, “They shall be to me a people.” Thus will I regard them; thus will I delight in them: and, on the other hand, they shall choose their portion in me, and give themselves to me for ever.

Before we pass on to our next topic, I cannot refrain from two brief remarks, arising out of the subject.

1. How infatuated are the enemies of God’s people! How great is the *folly* (to say nothing of the wickedness) of hating those whom God loves! It may seem, now, a light thing to despise, and ridicule, and vex the saints of the Most High: but “he that toucheth them, *toucheth the apple of his eye*.” (Zech. ii. 8.) Perpetual have been the attempts of the devil, and his children—the men of this world, to injure and destroy the church. A Pharaoh, a Herod, and others like them,

have, in every age, sought its ruin. But their efforts have invariably issued in their own confusion and overthrow. "Behold, they shall surely gather together, *but not by me*. Whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall for thy sake. No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper: and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn." O look to it, sinners, if you will not be *sharers* with God's people, that, at least, you be not among their *opposers*. "Their Redeemer is mighty: he will plead their cause with you." That shall be true, sooner or later, of every individual of his people, which he has foretold of Jerusalem, "In that day will I make Jerusalem *a burdensome stone* for all people. All that burden themselves with it shall be *cut in pieces*; though all the people of the earth be gathered together against it."

2. How glorious is the character, how exalted the privileges, of the saints! Whatever men may think of them in their present condition, there is a glory belongs to them which surpasses the highest conceptions of an earthly mind. They are even "now the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what they shall be; but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be *like* him, for we shall see him as he is." The day of his appearing is the day of "the *manifestation* of the sons of God." Then shall be seen the reality of those hopes which a profane and unbelieving world despise. The glory of the believer is, like that of his Master, while below, a *hidden* glory: carnal men see nothing of it. Look at those to whom Peter wrote. What ~~were~~ were they in the eye of men? "*Strangers scattered.*"

But what, in the eye of God? They were “elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience, and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ;” (each of the persons of the Godhead, you observe, engaged with delight in the salvation of their souls;) they had been “begotten again unto a lively hope, . . . to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for them,” and they for it, being “kept by the power of God, through faith, unto salvation!” My brethren, “therefore the world knoweth *us* not, because it knew *him* not.” Who that buffeted him, spit on him, scourged, mocked, pierced him, conceived what was the real character and dignity of that despised Nazarene? “Had they known, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.” And so, did men know the real character of his people, his mystical body, *partakers* with him of *his* glory, (John xvii. 22,) they would dare to scorn and injure them no more.

Are you, beloved, among this blessed people of God? O “reckon that the sufferings of this present time are *not worthy to be compared* with the glory that shall be revealed in you!” Realize your proper character, and walk worthy of it. “The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Cast off the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light.” Often think what, and whose you are, and whither you are going. To God, your God. To Christ, your life. To saints and angels, your companions in love and blessedness. To the mansions of your Father’s home,—“a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”

And you that are *not* such, seek and pray so to be. "Come with us, and we will do you good ; for the Lord hath spoken good concerning Israel." May the Lord enable you to make answer like Ruth to her pious mother-in-law, "Thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God."

There remains for our consideration,

II. God's own engagement to establish this relation between us and him. "They *shall* be to me a people." These words clearly express a *resolve* of God in this matter. He has so ordered the covenant of grace, that it is a *sure* covenant, a covenant of *continuance*, to all who have once embraced it. The Sinai covenant was not so : and *because* it was not so, "*because they continued not in it,*" (ver. 9,) *therefore* God made this new one with them, "*not according to*" the former, but one, the unconditional tenor of which evidently bespeaks the impossibility of its interruption, through the fault and folly of man. This we remarked before, in the first discourse ; but its importance will justify the repetition of it in this place.

The terms of the promise under review speak the same truth. They are absolute and unconditional. "They *shall* be to me a people." His word is passed for the effectual accomplishment of his grace ; and, therefore, his own divine character and glory are involved in it. If God be *able* to do what he has *resolved* to do, this relation cannot fail to be made good between him and them. He made choice of them from eternity hereto, in Christ, (Eph. i. 4 ;) chose them "*unto salvation*, through sanctification of the Spirit,

and belief of the truth ;” he gave them to the Son, as the reward of the “travail of his soul” in man’s redemption; and he covenanted with him, on their behalf, to bestow upon them, in time, all the grace that should effectually call them into fellowship with him, and *confirm* them in it unto the *end*. (1 Cor. i. 8, 9.) Hence Jude describes them to whom he writes, as, “sanctified by God the Father, and *preserved in Jesus Christ*, and called.” All things that concern them in time are wisely and graciously ordered, from the beginning to the end of their experience, with this view,—the bringing them to glory. His eye follows them in all their wanderings, while they are yet in their natural condition of enmity and ruin. His pity spares them : his grace, unknown and undesired by them, restrains them, in innumerable instances, from rushing upon their own destruction. He prepares all events that befall them (dark and intricate as they may seem) for fulfilling the designs of his everlasting love ; and in ways as manifold as the riches of his own wisdom, love, and power, he arrests them in their career of ruin ; calls them by his Spirit working in them in due season ; and constrains them, through Almighty grace, to obey the call, and henceforth to live indeed.

It was in prosecution of such a design that he sent his apostle to the dissolute and heathen city of Corinth ; and strengthened him, when there, by a special revelation of his purposes of mercy to many who at the time were sunk in the deepest mire of abomination and impurities. “Then spake the Lord to Paul, in the night, by a vision, saying, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace : for I am with thee ; and no man shall

set on thee to hurt thee; for *I have much people* in this city." (Acts xviii. 9, 10.) The Lord knew them; and because the time of mercy was come, he sent his labourer to gather in that harvest of precious souls into his church. So, wherever the heralds of the gospel came, we are told, "As many as were ordained unto eternal life believed." (Acts xiii. 48.) In all this we see the fulfilment of that sure counsel of God, expressed in this promise, "They shall be my people."

But this counsel goes further than the first establishment of such a relation. The covenant is an *everlasting* covenant. Its mercies are "*sure mercies of David.*" (Isa. lv. 3.) Herein God especially commends his grace towards his people. "Thou, Israel, art my servant, Jacob, whom I have chosen, the seed of Abraham, my friend *I have chosen thee, and not cast thee away.*" (Isa. xli. 8, 9.) There are no contingencies in this covenant; no uncertainties, arising out of the weakness and depravity of one of the parties concerned in it. All was foreseen of God, when in his infinite, his unchangeable love, he first prevailed with the froward hearts of his wanderers, to bring them into this relation to himself. He had, from the first, an intimate acquaintance with every peculiarity of their character, and arranged all his dealings so as to counteract their evil; to bring out of it glory to himself, in overruling it for the fulfilment of his own purpose; humbling them under the sense and shame of it; mortifying it, and preventing its dominion; and preserving them, through all the bitter experience of it, to glory. "*I knew* that thou wouldest deal very treacherously, and was called a transgressor from the womb: for my

name's sake will I defer mine anger ; and for my praise will I refrain for thee, that I cut thee not off." (Isa. xlviii. 8, 9.)

The notion of the believer falling, from grace received, into final perdition, may consist with the belief of some native power in him, at first, to procure it: to do more towards its acquisition than simply to *receive* it of God's free mercy, looking upon him in his ruin. Then, indeed, if it be native power by which he *acquires* this grace, he may finally lose it by his natural folly and waywardness. But if it be *all* of God's goodness, *predestinating* him ^{to} to be conformed to the image of his Son," that is, *to holiness*, and therefore making the soul "willing in the day of his power," then it is, surely, as contrary to reason as to the express testimony of Scripture, to believe, that he whose "gifts and callings" are "without repentance," who seeth the end from the beginning, should ever forsake what is, so entirely, "the work of his own hands." No, beloved, he who is "the author," is also "the finisher of faith." (Heb. xii. 2.) Though earth and hell combine against the believer, though his inward foes be ever ready to betray his soul, that word shall surely have its accomplishment, "They *shall* be my people."

The confidence of this truth is perfectly consistent with holy fear. We are, of ourselves, ever prone to depart from the ways of God ; and, therefore, that caution is necessary, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall." David, an eminent saint of God, fell, in a moment, into the slough of sin, after long and near fellowship with God ; and he felt the sad and shameful consequences of his fall, to the end of his

days. Hence arises the use of those warnings which are pressed so repeatedly, in the word of God, upon the consciences of his professing people. They are addressed to the visible church, the wise and foolish, the true and false : all of them standing in, at least, *outward* relation to God. Thus these warnings answer a double purpose. They admonish the unsound professor of his danger of final perdition, and forfeiture of Christian privileges : and, at the same time, they serve to *keep from these* the *true* people of God, by inspiring them with a holy and salutary fear, lest, peradventure, they, through the deceitfulness of sin, should be lead away with the error of the wicked, and fall from their own steadfastness. So that promise of God has its fulfilment, “I will not depart from them to do them good, and I will put *my fear* into their hearts, that *they shall not depart* from me.” (Jer. xxxii. 40.)

The belief of the final perseverance of the saints is a very different thing from a vain presumption that I am one of them, because of some dreams, or feelings, or past experiences, and that, *therefore*, I cannot fail of salvation, whatever may be the tenor of my life. The privilege, and the character to which it belongs, cannot be separated. The perseverance of God’s people is a perseverance *in holiness* ; and they, *therefore*, are sure of eternal life, because he who has called them to it, calls them to holiness, and pledges himself to *keep* them in holiness, as the way to life. He ordains them to the means as well as to the end. The assurance, then, I am a child of God, and therefore I shall never fail of salvation, cannot exist for a moment, but as the Spirit of God witnesses with my spirit, not that

he once (as I may think) *began*, but that he is *carry-ing on* a work of grace, a *sanctifying* work, in my heart. Any habitually indulged sin at once demonstrates that my confidence of interest in God, because of some former convictions and religious feelings, has been a delusion. And the sinful infirmities of God's people, in the same proportion that they grieve and banish the Comforter from their souls, take away *all enjoyment* of this truth of final perseverance ; not because the truth itself is doubted, but their agreement with the character of those in whom alone it is verified. God will never permit his children to comfort themselves, under circumstances like these, by any such abuse of his grace : they know and feel, that the doctrine of perseverance is one with which they have nothing to do, but as they are *turning from* their evil ways.

This doctrine is a precious cordial for the fainting soldier in the day of battle. It strengthens his weak hands ; confirms his feeble knees ; animates him under all the terribleness of conflict. He remembers that God is faithful, who has promised, " They shall *never perish*, neither shall any one pluck them out of my hand." Tell him this sweet truth, then, if he be wavering, ready to give up in despair, as, but for this hope of salvation, he well may. Tell him of it, if he be *even fallen*, so as he be but struggling and grappling with his enemy, though it be in the dust. But, if he be *parleying* with Satan, *tumpering* with sin, *ceasing* the warfare, this precious truth of God becomes as poison to his soul. He needs to be warned, in the words of the prophet, " When a righteous man turneth

away from his righteousness, and hath committed iniquity, and dieth in them, for his iniquity that he hath done shall he die.” There is no difficulty in reconciling this warning with the doctrine we are considering. But, whether there be or not, it is the truth of God as much as the other, and a most salutary truth for all who find themselves *giving way* to Satan, instead of *warring* against him. By it God keeps alive holy fear in the hearts of his children, and fulfils his grace, in their recovery from the snare of the devil to holiness and happiness.

Afflictions are another method used by God for the same gracious purpose. His children provoke him to anger by their backslidings, their grieving and quenching of his Spirit ; and, in consequence, he hides his face from them, and chastens them by inward or outward trials, making their way dark and sorrowful. He hedges them up on every side ; disappoints them of their expectations from the creature ; and so constrains them to say, “ I will return unto my first husband, for then was it better with me than now.” (Hos. ii. 6, 7.) Thus he departs not from that sure mercy of the covenant, “ They shall be to me a people.” You have this method of dealing with his covenant people distinctly pointed out. “ If,” God says, (speaking of Christ and his believing children,) “ If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments,—if they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments, then will I visit their transgression *with the rod*, and their iniquity with stripes. *Nevertheless*”—(here see again the infallible security of the covenant,) “ nevertheless, my loving-kindness will I *not utterly*

take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail ;" (to fail *them*, you observe, is to fail *him*;) "*my covenant will I not break.*" O blessed be God, for this most precious word ! How does it reconcile the believer to afflictions ! They are the chastenings of a Father, a covenant God, "*that we may not be condemned with the world.*" Amen, then ; let what will come, this gracious purpose in it sweetens all.

Thus unalterable, brethren, is that relation into which they are brought, who have come to God for mercy to their unrighteousness, through Christ. He puts them among his children : he contends with their remaining corruptions by the power and grace of his Spirit : he disciplines them by afflictions : he warns them, and inspires them with godly fear, by the admonitions of his word and Spirit : he departs from them, in sensible comforts, for a season, that they may not depart from him, nor he from them, for ever. By these, as well as by direct allurements of his love, he keeps them in obedience ; weans them from the world ; wins their affections ; and having caused them to be a people to him on earth, he ministers to them "an abundant entrance" into his everlasting kingdom and glory. There that word has its complete accomplishment, "I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people."

A few words of exhortation and encouragement may suitably close this interesting subject.

There are, surely, none of us, who can have contemplated the blessed character and privileges of the Lord's people, without feeling the desire arise in their hearts, O that it were so with me ! or, O that it were *more* so with me ! How few traces do I find of

resemblance to the saints of God! What reason have I to fear, that the floods of temptation, either from within or from without, will, one day, obliterate them altogether! Now here is encouragement to you to enter into this covenant relation to God: to say, as was foretold by the prophet, (Isa. xlv. 5,) I am the Lord's ; or, having so done, to trust in him that you shall *continue* such to the end. Many are afraid to join themselves, openly and avowedly, to the saints of God, lest, after all, they make shipwreck of faith and a good conscience, and turn back to perdition. But, if you be sincerely desirous of serving God, there is no such effectual *preservative from apostasy* as acting a *decided* part. Own God, and be sure God will own you. You cannot expect the Lord's succours while you are in the enemy's camp: but, come out, and *join* the hosts of the Lord, and so you put yourself under the banner of Omnipotence ; so the Lord is *under covenant* to preserve you in the day of battle. "Fear not," he says, "thou *worm* Jacob, and ye men of Israel ; *I will help thee*, saith the Lord, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel." So, then, my beloved brethren, by entering into covenant with God, remember, you do not so much bring yourselves under obligations to God, as God under obligation to you. *You are already* bound to be his people: and terrible will be the issue, if, from whatever cause it be, you refuse his service. But lay hold of this covenant ; say of him, by a decided renunciation of the world, The Lord is my God,—and you bring God (so to speak) under *obligation* to *keep* you in this new relation. Lord, (you may say,) thou hast pledged thyself, "They *shall* be my people." Be it

unto me according to thy word. There is no health in me ; no strength, by confidence in which I have ventured to forsake the world, and live unto thee ; but thy promise, thy faithfulness, thy everlasting love, O thou same Lord, yesterday, to-day, and for ever, is my sufficiency. On these I cast myself ; leave me but for an instant, and I perish. But no, beloved, leave you that have so come to him he never can, he never will. The faith of this truth will enable you, with a good courage, to confess and serve him ; because, in the full view of your own nothingness, you will yet “ be strong *in the Lord*, and in the power of *his might*.” “ Israel shall be saved in the Lord with an everlasting salvation : ye shall not be ashamed nor confounded, world without end.”

PART VI.

DIVINE KNOWLEDGE.

HEBREWS viii. 11.—“*And they shall not teach, every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord; for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.*”

EVER since the days of Isaiah has the promise been given to the church of God, with special reference to the latter, or gospel times, “All thy children shall be taught of the Lord;” (Isa. liv. 13;) shall be “the Lord’s scholars.” (Compare Isa. viii. 16.) The subject matter of this teaching is God himself; or, which is the same thing, Christ, the revelation of God, glorious in goodness and grace to redeemed sinners. This is clear from Christ’s own reasoning on the promise with the Jews, (John vi. 45,) where he shows the effect of this teaching in leading sinners to himself. “It is written in the prophets, And they shall be all taught of God: every man, therefore, that hath heard, and hath *learned of the Father, cometh unto me.*”

In the words of the text, we have this gracious promise renewed to the church, and formally imbodyed in the gospel covenant, as necessary to its fulness of spiritual blessings. To the promises of divine *renewal* and divine *relationship*, which we have before treated,

is added that of divine *enlightening*,—the gift of that “Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of God,” which the apostle so fervently desires, and prays for, on behalf of his Ephesian converts. (Eph. i. 17.) But the words under review are yet more full and definite. God evidently promises, in them, the bestowal of a knowledge of himself, that should be incomparably superior to any that was before enjoyed. We may mark the superiority of this knowledge of God, under the gospel, in three principal particulars:—

1. In the *degree* of it.
2. In the *extent* of its bestowal.
3. In the *mode* of its communication.

It is superior in its *degree*. The knowledge of God enjoyed under the old dispensation, was either that immediately conveyed by it, or that imparted to the saints, independent of it, in virtue of the promise to Abraham, which (we need hardly now repeat) was the gospel covenant, in embryo. The light afforded by the old covenant itself will scarcely bear a moment’s comparison with that which shines forth under the gospel. It was as moonlight to the meridian day : borrowing all its lustre from the Sun of righteousness, ere he had risen upon a dark world, and presenting a faint reflection of his glory. Such were its institutions : its paschal lamb, and other sacrifices : its meats, and drinks, and divers washings : its temple, with the holy of holies, and the ark of the covenant, and the cherubim of glory shadowing the mercy-seat ; all these were “patterns of things in the heavens ;” types and symbols of divine mysteries ; chiefly, of the person and work of Christ. Believers under the gospel can see, in

these, an exact and beautiful representation given, by the wisdom of God, of the good things that were, then, to come. But, before the actual incarnation of the promised Messiah, they were, very much, as an allegorical painting without a key to it ;—a mystery, of the real meaning of which, the best instructed among the Jews had but little *accurate* perception. Their knowledge was, at the best, but shadowy: ours real and substantial. Christ, the *truth* of all the types and figures of the law, is come ; and, in him, this word is indeed fulfilled, “They shall know me.” (See p. 34.)

But consider, again, the knowledge of God which was enjoyed by the saints, independent of the covenant under which they were, as a part of the Jewish nation. The law could not disannul the promise previously given to Abraham ; and by it, all his spiritual seed, then as well as now, enjoyed, in their measure, the blessings of the covenant of grace. Moses, Samuel, David, and many other, under the old dispensation, had real, spiritual acquaintance with God, in an extraordinary degree. They walked with him in a nearness of holy fellowship, to which, in these days, we can find but few parallels: witnesses for God how easily his Spirit can compensate for scantiness of outward revelation ; and how unavailing, without his influences, is all external knowledge of divine mysteries. Still, if we compare their knowledge of God with that possessed under the gospel, its immense inferiority is apparent on the most superficial consideration of it. That word of our Lord is made good : “Many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, *and have not seen them*; and to hear

those things which ye hear, *and have not heard them.*”

The mystery, for instance, of *a trinity of persons* in the unity of the Godhead, may be most clearly and satisfactorily collected from the Old Testament, and was, doubtless, part of the faith of the ancient church. But, in the revelation of Jesus Christ, this truth stands out with a prominence and importance which completely throw into the shade all discovery of it previous to his appearing in the flesh. There is not a hope which the Christian has, but is essentially interwoven with this fundamental truth of the divine nature. Further, the *character* of God was known, in all its important features, by the Old Testament saints. They knew, and adored, his infinite holiness, his unalterable truth, his unbending justice, his immeasurable compassions. So God revealed himself to Moses, (Ex. xxxiv. 6,) “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth; keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty.” Compare Jer. xxx. 11; Nah. i. 3.) This is clearly God’s glory, (a just God and a Saviour,) as it is revealed in Christ, who on this occasion made himself known to Moses: and so some understand those words of the angel Jehovah to him, (Ex. xxxiii. 23,) “Thou shalt see my back parts,” *i. e.* my after-appearance in human nature. But, after all, if we would see these glorious attributes of God in all their heights, and depths, and length and breadth, passing knowledge, we must contemplate them, as they are revealed, not at Sinai, but at Calvary. They who never

witnessed that amazing spectacle,—God-man crucified for sinners,—with all their precious knowledge of God, knew, *comparatively*, nothing of his character. Upon the cross of Jesus is inscribed, as it were, in his blood, “They shall know me.”

The testimony of Christ respecting John the Baptist is remarkable, in this connexion. He stood *between* the two dispensations. He saw Christ in the flesh, and pointed to him as “the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.” So far, then, he was privileged above all that had gone before. He was “more than a prophet.” “Verily, I say unto you, among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist.” But neither could *he* look at Calvary. He saw not the *completed* salvation of Christ: and so far, again, *his* privileges were inferior to those of the *least* of us, who live after him. “He that is *least* in the kingdom of heaven is *greater than he*.”

To go no further, then, in particularizing instances, we say with confidence, on the authority of Christ himself, that the knowledge of God enjoyed under the gospel is incomparably superior, in degree, to that vouchsafed under the law. “We all, with open face, *unveiled* face, behold, as in a glass, the glory of the Lord.”

As the knowledge of God, here promised, is superior in the degree of it, so further,

In the *extent* of its bestowal. Under the Jewish economy the spiritual knowledge of God was not only confined, almost exclusively, to that single nation, but was very partial, even among them. It was preserved

with difficulty, (so to speak,) by the exhortations and labours of a few pious patriarchs, judges, prophets, and other holy men, in succession, from age to age, in the midst of general ignorance and indifference (to say the least) of the great body of the people, and utter darkness among the nations by whom they were surrounded. The Jews, so long as they fell not into gross idolatry, continued in their national relation to God; and were accounted by him as his covenant people, even though they had no *spiritual* acquaintance with him. But, in this new covenant, it is otherwise. A spiritual and saving knowledge of God is promised, in it, as the portion of *all*, without exception, who are truly interested therein. “*All shall know me, from the least to the greatest.*”

The third point of superiority which we were to notice, in this knowledge of God under the gospel, is,

The *mode* of its communication. “They shall not teach, every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord.” This language clearly imports, that God would vouchsafe a superior *kind* of teaching to any that had been enjoyed commonly, or *by covenant*, among his ancient people. God spake to the Jews, at sundry times, and in divers manners, by his servants, the prophets, calling upon them to know the Lord; but they would not hear. The ministry of their most eminent prophets was, for the most part, a ministry of condemnation to those who heard them. “Go, tell this people,” (Isa. vi. 9, 10.) “Hear ye, indeed, but understand not; and see ye, indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat; and make their ears heavy; and shut

their eyes: lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and convert, and be healed." So, again, to Ezekiel, "Son of man, I send thee to a rebellious nation, that hath rebelled against me; they and their fathers have transgressed against me, even unto this very day. And thou shalt speak my words unto them, *whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear*; for they are most rebellious." (Ezek. ii. 3. 7.) But, under the covenant of grace, God not only speaks *to us*, by a greater than man, but *in us*, by his Spirit. Though we be not *independent* of human teaching, (for "it has pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe,") yet the saints, in receiving the knowledge of God through the ministry of man, receive it not on the *authority* of man. There is an *inward* teaching, by God the Spirit, which accompanies the word, written or preached: "*an unction from the Holy One*," (1 John ii. 20,) "*whereby they know all things*." Hereby they have such a spiritual apprehension of all necessary truth, as no human teaching can communicate, no unassisted wisdom of men can attain to. It is a heaven-born ray, imparted immediately from God himself: a divine instinct, whereby, though fools (it may be) in *human* knowledge, they are wiser than the wisest of natural men, in that only profitable science—the saving knowledge of the blessed God.

Such, brethren, is the outline of the subject which is brought before us in the words of my text. God grant it may be fulfilled in our experience! that, while man addresses the outward sense, God the Spirit may speak to the heart: that he may give us, both small

and great, that knowledge of God, and of Jesus Christ, whom God hath sent, which is "*eternal life*" to all who have it.

Dismissing, now, the *comparison* of the two dispensations, in these particulars, we may consider the knowledge of God, which we enjoy, *absolutely*, as it is in itself.

The subject before us has three distinct parts, answering to the former three, which will demand our attention.

I. A knowledge of God, covenanted, under the gospel. "They shall know me."

II. The universality of this knowledge of him by his covenant people. "*All* shall know me, from the least to the greatest."

III. A super-human source of this knowledge. "They shall not teach, every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord."

I. A knowledge of God, covenanted, under the gospel. "They shall know me."

This (strange to say) is a knowledge little thought of, or valued by men in general : and, which is stranger still, it is that of which all men in Christian countries think they are in possession. Whatever be their acknowledged *neglect* of God, that they are really *ignorant* of him they have no suspicion. And, in truth, if the knowledge of God here supposed were no more than a set of notions, learnt in childhood, and amounting to a mere vague acknowledgment of his being, and some principal attributes of that being,—

then, a claim might, perhaps, be laid to it. But, to know God indeed, according to the *true* sense of the term, is to have such an apprehension of his infinite majesty and holiness, as shall lay us low, cause us to *fear* before him, and to bow with deepest submission to his will. It is to have such a knowledge of his glorious goodness as shall fill us with holy *delight* in him, intense desire after communion with him, and enjoyment of his favour. Further, it is so to behold his glory, as to be ourselves *transformed* into the same image of holiness and goodness : to be ourselves “partakers of the divine nature.”

Now this is a knowledge of God, of which, alas ! most of those who profess to know him have absolutely nothing. And to the want of it the Scriptures trace up all those floods of actual wickedness that are for ever deluging the face of human society. Thus we read of the sons of Eli, that they “were sons of Belial ; *they knew not the Lord.*” (1 Sam. ii. 12.) When our Lord foretells the persecution of his followers by the Jews, he thus accounts for it : “These things will they do unto you, because they have *not known the Father, nor me.*” (John xvi. 3.) Does the apostle exhort the Thessalonians to keep the vessel of the body in sanctification and honour ? He ascribes the opposite evil to ignorance, precisely, of the same kind. “Not (saith he) in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles *which know not God.*” And, again, of the heathen, generally,—after noticing how they walked in the vanity of their minds, he adds, “Having the understanding *darkened*, being alienated from the life of God through the *ignorance* that is in them, because

of the *blindness* of their hearts.” Such, as to any true and saving knowledge of God, is the state of *all natural men*, whether they be heathen, or like the sons of Eli, enjoy the outward revelation of God and his will. “There is none that *understandeth*, there is none that *seeketh* after God.” They neither *have* this knowledge, nor have they so much understanding as to *seek* after it. The sovereign grace of God, that convinces his people of sin, and so of their need of mercy, gives them the first *real* insight into his character. Along with the discovery of their own guilt, (which itself arises from spiritual views of his character,) they are taught to discern his “glory in the face of Jesus Christ ; the union of perfect holiness with unbounded goodness to sinners, in and by his Son. And when, by the same grace, they embrace this covenant, founded on free forgiveness of all trespasses, through the finished work of Christ, then have they, also, a title to this blessed promise of it : they experience the faithfulness of God in its continual accomplishment to their souls—“They shall know me.” They acquire larger, and more influential views of God ;—views which engage their *hearts* to him, and powerfully, though gradually, subdue the yet remaining corruptions of an evil nature. Thus the apostle describes believers as “*renewed* in knowledge,” and connects with it their advancement in all the graces of the Christian character. “Being *fruitful* in every good work, and *increasing in the knowledge of God.*” “Grow *in grace*,” saith St. Peter, “and *in the knowledge* of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

This knowledge of God, which is matter of promise

to his covenant people, we may consider under two heads. It consists in saving acquaintance with God,

(1.) *As he is in himself*,—in his revealed nature and character.

(2.) *As he is to us*,—in his purposes towards us, and the interest which we have in him.

(1.) *As he is in himself*,—in his revealed nature and character. At our entrance upon the Christian life, the holiness of God, as a sin-hating God, and his mercy in forgiving sin, through a Saviour's blood, are the parts of his character chiefly contemplated by the soul, and these but imperfectly. It is by the believer's *walk* with God, in life, the *experimental* acquaintance he gets with him, in the mystery of redemption, that he attains to more solid, more comprehensive views, of his glory, grace, and truth, as they shine forth in the person and work of Jesus. The truth, moreover, of God's nature, as one God in trinity, and trinity in unity, becomes daily better understood, and delighted in : not as a matter of speculation, and presumptuous inquiry, but as ministering a solid *foundation of trust* to a guilty sinner. As far as the believer can see, the very *possibility* of the salvation of his soul rests on this distinction of persons in the one blessed God : so that the Father could give his only begotten Son ; the Son could offer himself without spot to God ; and the Spirit of the Father and the Son could go forth, to apply this salvation by the testimony of Jesus, quickening his soul together with Christ, and fitting him for the enjoyment of God.

Thus the saints of God have *experimental* knowledge of this mystery of the Godhead, by distinct com-

munion with each of the sacred persons:—with the Father, in his everlasting love ; with the Son, in his redeeming grace ; with the Spirit, by his personal indwelling, in all his sanctifying and refreshing influences. The longer the Christian lives, the more he sees of wisdom, holiness, and love, beyond degree, in the plan, the accomplishment, the application, of the salvation which is by Christ: mercy and truth, blended with infinite holiness, in the Father ; infinite amiableness in Christ; infinite condescension, and tenderness, in God the Spirit. This knowledge, by sweet experience, of the divine nature and character, as they are made known in Christ, is the food and feast of his soul, all the days of his pilgrimage ; the foretaste of that fulness of delights which he shall enjoy, when he shall see God as he is, and know him even as he is known. Hence we find God thus speaking by the prophet, (Jer. ix. 24,) “ Let him that glorieth glory in this, *that he understandeth and knoweth me*, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth ; for in these things I delight, saith the Lord.” Now this the believer does. He glories in his knowledge of the blessed God. He lifts up his eyes, with tears of joy, in increasing discoveries, from time to time, yea, *taste*, of his goodness ; and can cry to him, with unutterable delight, “ My God, I know thee.” (Hos. viii. 2.) We pass on, then, by an easy transition, to consider this knowledge of God, secondly,

(2.) *As he is to us*,—in his purposes towards us, and the interest which we have in him. The sinner is often brought to God in ways which, for a long time,

he cannot comprehend. He knows not what God is doing. Outward judgments, perhaps, for sin, and inward rebukes of conscience, with discoveries of deserved wrath, combine to afflict his soul, and lead him to the conclusion that God is about to destroy him,—that no mercy is intended for him. Hear God describing these dealings with his people, (Isa. xlii. 16,) “I will bring the blind by a way that they knew not ; I will lead them in paths which they have not known,”—and, now, see the issue:—“I will make darkness light before them, and crooked things straight ; these things will I do unto them, and not forsake them.” This grace he accomplishes, when, having thoroughly *humbled* the sinner, having made him willing to submit himself to *his way* of salvation, he brings that salvation into his experience ; causes him to see the *need* that there has been for all God’s dealings with him, hitherto so dark and inexplicable, and gives him the assurance that, notwithstanding all these, his thoughts towards him, from everlasting, have been “thoughts of peace, and not of evil,” and that all things are working together for his good.

This is a knowledge of God which may well make the contemplation of him, well make communion with him, exceedingly delightful to the soul of a Christian. He knows something, not only of the *general* character of God, as a God of mercy and grace in Christ, but of his mind towards *him*. This redeeming God, saith he, glory and blessing be on his name ! has looked on *me* : has had purposes of love towards *me* (unworthy as I am) in Christ. He bore with me in all the provocations of my unregenerate condition : his Spirit has

convinced me of sin, and has made a Saviour precious ; and he is leading me, and will lead me, "by a right way, to a city of habitations." My beloved brethren, this is a little of what God means, when he promises of his people, "They shall know me." No barren, miserable notions, about a being never realized nor desired ; but a life-giving, joy-inspiring knowledge of him, which wins the whole man from idols, to serve the living and true God : to say, with the Psalmist, There is none in heaven, or earth, that I desire, in comparison with thee.

Further, believers know God, as having *a near interest* in him. All those glorious and pleasant relations which they bear to God, and God to them, are summed up in this, that they are "IN CHRIST." (Rom. viii. 1; and xvi. 7. 2 Cor. v. 17. Phil. iii. 9. 1 John v. 20.) What *he* is, *they* are, in the eye of God ; having one life, (Col. iii. 4,) one Spirit, (1 Cor. vi. 17,) one Father, (John xx. 17,) one Glory. "The glory which thou gavest me, I have given them ; that they may be one, even as we are one. *I in them, and thou in me*, that they may be made *perfect in one*." Brethren, to have this interest in God, through his Son, this is to know God ; and they who have it cannot fail to know him. To this point we have a very remarkable testimony by St. John, "We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding that we may *know him* that is true, and we *are in him* that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ." (Compare also the 4th with the 5th verse of his second chapter.)

Believers, then, know God by *vital union* with him, in Christ, through faith. This is the crowning know-

ledge of God, the all in all, to the Christian, in his present condition. In Christ is his life, his strength, his fruitfulness, his joy. There is not a single grace which he exercises, all his days, but he puts it forth, (as the branch puts forth its fruit,) simply in virtue of the life and nourishment immediately derived, for that particular grace, from the living root. The great object of God, in the diversified experience of his children, is to lead them into the *practical* knowledge of this, their interest in Christ. He constrains them, often by bitter visitations, because they will not learn without them, to look out of themselves, for sufficiency, to him: to live, *each day*, on Christ, for all they would be or do, in that day, acceptable to God. And exactly as they can say with the apostle, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me," may they be said to have that acquaintance with God which is here promised. They *know him*, because he dwelleth in them, and they in him. (John xiv. 17. 1 John iv. 13.)

Such, then, is the meaning of the promise, "They shall know me." We have, further, an assurance of,

II. The *universality* of this knowledge of God by his covenant people. "*All* shall know me, from the least to the greatest."

It will throw light upon this part of our subject, if we recur, briefly, to the circumstances of the old dispensation, under which this privilege of divine knowledge was far from belonging to the generality of God's covenant people. They had but "*the form* of knowledge, and of the truth in the law." It was shrouded under the veil of typical institutions, prophe-

cies, and dark sayings. The ordinances and ministrations of that covenant were carnal, not spiritual: so that the men of that day were put to the necessity of much painful search, to discover, if it were possible, the hidden meaning of that which was presented to them. They had the knowledge of God conveyed therein; but, as St. Paul says of our present knowledge, compared with that of the heavenly world, so we may say of theirs, in contrast with that which believers enjoy under the gospel, it was, *ὡς ἐστὶν πρὸς ὑμᾶς, ἐν αἰνίγματι*, “through a glass, in a riddle.” Hence (to repeat what we observed in the first discourse) they needed a mutual communication of light received upon it from time to time, as persons helping one another in the dark. The testimony of St. Peter (also before noticed) is very remarkable on this point. He represents the *very men who foretold* the salvation of Christ, as inquiring, and searching diligently, concerning it,—even *their own testimony* to it. “Unto whom, (says St. Peter,) it was revealed, that, *not unto themselves*, but unto *us*, they did minister the things which are now reported unto you, by them which have preached the gospel unto you, with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.” It is easy to perceive, then, that the knowledge of God afforded by the old covenant, alone, would be, to the great mass of the Jewish nation, as darkness. They would never be able to unravel the hidden sense of their religious mysteries: and even they who were at all enabled so to do, did so, in virtue of their interest in the gospel promise to Abraham, rather than by any grace of the Sinai covenant itself: and, in this state of things, that mutual encouragement

and helping one of another to “know the Lord,” was a natural result, and not without its use. You have an illustration of this in our Lord’s time. He opened his mouth in parables, and dark sayings, (Matt. xiii. 35, from Ps. lxxviii. 2:) he gave hints, and obscure notices, of what was to befall himself. The consequence was, that, until the descent of the Spirit, his disciples had no distinct perception of the truth communicated. They were therefore continually questioning, and reasoning among themselves,—What does this mean, or that mean? They sought out, *one of another*, the true knowledge of God conveyed therein.

The same thing exists among ourselves, at this day, with respect to unfulfilled prophecy. The people of God are much in the dark upon it. Long and laborious investigation, and comparison of one prediction with another, is necessary to arrive at the least clue to its meaning. Learned and holy men have thrown light, at different times, upon different parts of it, and so knowledge is increased. But, after all, the variety of opinions which the wisest and best entertain upon it, show the real difficulty, and obscurity, in which it is, at present, shrouded. It is a subject which, above all other, calls for great modesty and diffidence, and the utmost allowance for diversity of views. But what I would call your attention to, here, is the result. This is, precisely, that noticed in this promise, as to the old dispensation. Men are saying, one to another, Know the Lord. We are glad of all the mutual help that can be afforded. We gather the sentiments of our brethren, and compare, and weigh, and wait for further light, and are glad to listen to any who may be competent to speak upon the subject. Just so it was under

the old dispensation : but then, observe,—for this is a most important difference,—that the obscurity upon *their* minds, was not regarding any details of the divine government of events, but regarding *salvation itself*; the knowledge of the Lord in those most essential particulars, on which hung the eternal interests of their souls. Herein they who knew *most* of him, under the old covenant, knew him but imperfectly. They had never seen Christ with unveiled face ; and their apprehension of his grace was, in many respects, faint and uncertain : while by far the greater number of those who were under that covenant had no saving knowledge of God at all.

But it is the essential character of all who are truly interested in this better covenant, that they have a spiritual knowledge of God. “*All shall know me.*” There is *not one* true child of God, under the gospel, but has his measure of it. He discerns the perfections of God, as they are displayed in the work of redemption ; that “mystery which, in other ages, was not made known to the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his apostles and prophets, (and by them to the church,) through the Spirit.” The “*least*” of God’s covenant people, as well as the greatest, has *now* a satisfying, soul-quieting acquaintance with God : such an understanding of the method of peace with God, through Christ, as even prophets, and righteous men of old, the most spiritual of their day, desired in vain. “The wayfaring man, though a fool, shall not err therein.” Yea, often, the poor, and ignorant, and weak in intellect, of this world, are, in the sovereignty of divine grace, *pre-eminently* “rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which God hath promised to them that love

him." Even babes and sucklings, through the mighty power of God's Spirit, have "perfected praise," in the apprehension of this great salvation :—many a little child knowing, in the simple knowledge of a crucified Jesus, more than all the wisdom of the world, nay, even of the Old Testament church, could impart. "All shall know me, from the least to the greatest."

We must not forget that this covenant is yet to be made, in the latter days, with the literal seed of Israel and Judah. "This is the covenant that I will make *with the house of Israel*, after those days, saith the Lord." (ver. 10.) And it seems agreeable to the concurrent testimony of all prophecy, to expect a fulfilment of this promise, (and indeed of *all* the promises of this covenant,) at that period, far beyond any thing that has yet been enjoyed. "*When the Lord shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory.*" Of this increase of spiritual light and joy, in that day to which the longing expectation of the Christian church is now directed, the prophets everywhere speak in glowing language. "The light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be seven-fold, as the light of seven days, in the day that the Lord bindeth up the breach of his people, and healeth the stroke of their wound." (Isa. xxx. 26.) At present, we have reason to mourn over the little impression which the gospel makes upon the generality of those who hear it. They know not the Lord. They have the *outward* privileges of the covenant, but they have never really *consented* to it, so as to have the *spiritual* enjoyment of its blessings. Still we complain with the prophet, "Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the Lord reveal-

ed?" But, when God shall finally establish this covenant with his ancient people, he will do it, not merely in the outward dispensation of it, but *in power*. The distinction of nominal and real, carnal and spiritual, professors, shall be, if not altogether, yet comparatively, done away. They shall *all* know the Lord. "Thy people shall be *all* righteous." "Their seed shall be known among the Gentiles, and their offspring among the people: all that see them shall acknowledge them, that they are the seed which the Lord hath blessed." (Isa. lxi. 9.) And the era of millennial blessedness, commencing with their national conversion to the faith of Christ, will witness the establishment of this same grace, and knowledge of God, among all the nations of the earth. "The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the seas." But the promise is not to be *limited* to the nation of Israel, or to the times of the *universal* triumph of the gospel. The covenant is that under which *we* live; and which has been "established" with all the saints of God, ever since Christ died, and rose again. For it is the covenant of which he is Mediator, and from the least to the greatest, of those who now come to God on the ground of it, this promise shall be verified in their experience, "All shall know me." Mark, thirdly,

III. A superhuman source of this knowledge. "They shall not teach, every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord."

This is, certainly, not said to disparage God's appointed ordinance of public preaching, or mutual ex-

hortation. It was under this very gospel covenant, that he first gave the command, "Go ye into all the world, and *preach* the gospel to every creature." Nor is preaching merely an institution for first calling the attention of *unconverted* men to the doctrine of Christ. Rather, it is expressly ordered *for the church*. "He gave some apostles, and some prophets, and some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, *for the perfecting of the saints*, for the work of the ministry, *for the edifying of the body of Christ*." Accordingly, you will find, they are blamed, in this very epistle, (chap. x. 25,) who *forsook the assembling of themselves* together; and the charge to these Hebrew believers is—not, *Teach not*, every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, but, "*Exhort* one another *daily*, while it is called to-day." (chap. iii. 13.) We have anticipated the meaning of the words before us, under the preceding head; referring them to that mutual communication of light imparted on divine truths, which is natural, and useful, when they are involved in much obscurity. This was to be, *comparatively*, superseded under the gospel; inasmuch as all, small and great, would have, *in themselves*, a satisfying, and sure knowledge of God, in all things pertaining to salvation. They would be "the Lord's scholars:" and this, the words we are considering clearly imply.

The people of God, then, under the gospel, are still dependent upon the appointed messengers of Christ, who break to them the bread of life, and unfold, from time to time, the mystery of redemption, as "fellow-workers with God." But the believer does not *so* learn of man, as that he receives the truth in that *uncertainty*, or sense of possible error, which attaches

to every *mere* word of man. There is a revelation of God to his children, a knowledge of himself, which he gives them immediately, by his Spirit, that is, like light, *its own witness*. The man who has it is *sure* that he has it, and that it is of God. He can say, as the people did of Christ to the woman of Samaria, "Now we believe, *not because of thy saying*, for we have heard him *ourselves*, and *know* that this is *indeed* the Christ, the Saviour of the world." Not that our *feelings* alone are the test of truth, in this matter; but, wherever there is this genuine illumination by God's Spirit, it will be found exactly to accord with the outward revelation, given by the same Spirit, in the written word. It is maintained, and grows continually, by meditation upon that word, in faith and prayer, and in the use of those human ministrations by which God has appointed that his children shall be nourished. *In these*, God himself meets them, and teaches them, by his Spirit. Hence the gospel is called, "the ministration *of the Spirit*:" and in this light all true believers receive it, "not as the word of man, but, as it is in truth, the word of God."

St. John beautifully refers to this inward teaching of the Spirit, as above all the teaching of man, in his first epistle. "These things have I written unto you, concerning them that seduce you. But *the anointing* which ye have received of him abideth in you; *and ye need not that any man teach you*; but, as the same anointing teacheth you of *all things*, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him." So we find Paul writing to the Thesalonians. "But, as touching brotherly love, ye *need not that I write* unto you; for ye yourselves are

taught of God to love one another.” Now, both these holy men were, at the very time they thus wrote, *instructing* and admonishing the church: and this they felt to be continually necessary. “It was *needful* for me,” says St. Jude, “to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.” To the same effect writes St. Peter; “I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things; though ye know them, and be established in the present truth.” But they would so speak, so teach, as always to direct the souls of believers to that *superior* teacher, by whom themselves had attained the saving knowledge of God; and by whom (as they were well aware) every individual of the Lord’s family, the least as well as the greatest, receives it also. With this the experience of all believers exactly agrees. The Lord himself is their teacher. The Spirit of truth guides them into all truth. They may not be able to argue for it, or explain it to the silencing of the cavils of such as gain-say it; but “one thing they know, that, whereas they were blind, now they see.” They could as soon doubt the existence of the sun in the firmament, when they see his light, and are warmed and enlivened by his rays, as doubt for a moment the reality of that truth of God, the light of which shines in their hearts, and the power of which has broken the chains of sin, enabled them to overcome the world, restored in them the image of God, and won their hearts to him in love. And comparing themselves with their former selves, when they had the same outward revelation, the same ordinances and yet were in darkness, as many are still around them,—utterly opposed to the truth as it is in Jesus,

though professing to believe and obey it,—to what can they ascribe the blessed change, but to the enlightening and life-giving influences of the Lord the Spirit “opening their eyes, and turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God?” To this immediate illumination, by God himself, the inspired writers everywhere ascribe all saving knowledge of God, in themselves or others. “The Son of God is come, and hath *given us* an understanding, *that we may know* him that is true.” (1 John v. 20.) “*God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*” (2 Cor. iv. 6.)

This important point,—the indispensable necessity for spiritual illumination,—St. Paul opens at length, in his first epistle to the Corinthians; having been led to the subject by a mention of his own preaching among them, at the beginning of their acquaintance with the gospel. The opulent and profligate city of Corinth, suited, by its peculiar localities, to be a mart of nations, attracted much of the philosophy, so called, of ancient Greece. There might be found, in abundance, the vain and self-important disputers of this world: the men who sought after wisdom, and rejected nothing in the form of wisdom, but its divine reality. Such was Corinth when Paul visited it; or, rather, when God visited it, having “much people in that city.” How does he set Paul to gather them in? Shall he accommodate his testimony to the speculating, curious, philosophical character of the audience whom he addressed? Shall he soothe their prejudices by qualifying, disguising, withholding, for a season, or in

a measure, the offensiveness, the foolishness, of his message—salvation, by one crucified as a malefactor? It is quite evident, from the whole tenor of his epistle to them, that he had a keen perception of their state and character, had taken an accurate measure of it, and pondered well how it became him to proceed. And what is the resolution to which he came? What was the style of his ministrations? “I came *not with excellency of speech, or of wisdom*, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I *determined not to know any thing* among you, save Jesus Christ and him crucified. . . . And my speech, and my preaching, was *not with enticing words of man’s wisdom*, but with demonstration of the Spirit, and of power.” And then he gave his reason for so doing. “That your faith should not stand in the *wisdom of men*, but in the power of God.”

He was sure that, be the pride of man what it might, the doctrine of “Christ crucified” was, “to them which are called, the *power* of God, and the *wisdom* of God:” and he most scrupulously avoided mixing herewith any embellishments of oratory, or forms of philosophical argumentation, that might even *seem*, by their own enticing influence, to attract the mere natural man to its reception. His teaching should *not* be *human* teaching, *but divine*. O that all who profess to preach the same gospel preached it in the same way!

But this mention of his renunciation of the arts of human wisdom leads him to the point which we have here, more particularly, in hand,—the necessity of spiritual illumination, for any saving knowledge of divine truths. Our message, saith he, is true wisdom, (ver. 6,) “but not the *wisdom* of this world. . . . But

we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery; even the hidden wisdom . . . which none of the princes of this world knew. . . . As it written, (Isa. lxiv. 4,) Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man (natural men) the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit." And this he repeats, yet more fully, (ver. 12:) "Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but *the Spirit which is of God, that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.*"

Here, then, is, obviously, a matter of infinite moment, to all who enjoy the outward revelation of the gospel of Christ. The words which we have just been considering declare, most unequivocally, that there can be no saving knowledge of the things of God, but by the immediate teaching of the Spirit of God. There is such a thing, (and, alas! it is no uncommon thing,) as attendance upon the plainest ministry of the gospel, acquaintance with the letter of the Scriptures, and even profession of evāgelical truth, while yet the soul is *totally in the dark* as to any spiritual understanding of spiritual mysteries. Men satisfy themselves with words, and notions, about divine things; but the reality is never embraced, no, nor even so much as adequately conceived by them: as far as it is apprehended, there is, still, all the hostility of a carnal mind against the truth. "The natural man," saith the apostle, (in the same chapter referred to above,) "*receiveth not* the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him: *neither can he* know them, because they are spiritually discerned." The persons here spoken of are described as natural, (*ψυχικός* the same word as that

used by St. Jude, (ver. 19,) to express persons “*not having the Spirit* ;” *ψυχικοὶ, πνεῦμα μὴ ἔχοντες*.) Now all such men, when the truths of the gospel are proposed to them, though it be “in the words which the Holy Ghost teacheth,” *receive them not*—see no glory in them—no correspondence with their character and condition; nay, count the representations made to them of spiritual joys and terrors, of corruption in them, and mercy in God, of man’s ruin, and recovery, through the gospel, to holiness and happiness, of the vanity of the world, and the blessedness of forsaking it for another,—to be overstrained, false, gloomy, enthusiastic. “They are foolishness unto them.” And, out of this darkness of a blind and sinful heart, nothing but the power of Him who “turneth the shadow of death into the morning” can ever rescue men. “Neither *can* he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” Alas! what a daily comment do the lives of men furnish to this awful truth!

My brethren, is this your condition? Do you see no beauty in the things of God? Are the doctrines of the cross of Christ strange to your mind? And does the experience of the believer appear folly and fanaticism? Here the reason is made apparent. These things are “*spiritually discerned* ;” and if that promise has never been fulfilled in you,—“They shall be taught of the Lord,” it is no wonder you apprehend them not. O pray that your eyes may be opened to see the truth. “If our gospel be hid, it is hid *to them that are lost* : in whom the god of this world hath *blinded the minds* of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.” (2 Cor. iv. 4.) You

need the spirit of a little child, who, conscious of its own ignorance, looks up to a parent for teaching. Without this you cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven. (Matt. xviii. 3.) You may, perhaps, find your way, out of an erroneous, into an orthodox *creed*. You may have much Biblical learning, and understanding of theology *as a science*; but knowledge of God unto salvation,—that knowledge which *humbles* for sin, *attracts* to God, *transforms* into his holy image and likeness, none but God's Spirit can impart. Cry mightily to him for this grace. Become a fool in your own eyes, that you may be wise indeed: and so shall that heavenly light break in upon your soul, which brings its own immediate evidence along with it. Never use the word of God but with fervent prayer for his divine enlightening in the use of it. It was not given to make men wise independent of himself. But take it to God, and he will shine upon its blessed truths, and you shall see indeed.

Let us gather, in conclusion, two or three profitable lessons from this whole subject.

1. Do we possess such superior light, and knowledge of God, to any which the saints of old enjoyed? O, then, let the superior *effects* of this knowledge be clearly discernible in our conduct. To see God indeed, is to be like God. So St. John reasons; "We know that . . . we shall be like him, *for we shall see him.*" He infers the certainty of our *resemblance* to him from the certainty of our *vision* of him; and the same is true, in its measure, now. The spiritual discovery of God changes the beholder into the image of God. What an elevated standard of holiness then, what spiritual affections, what superiority to the trifles of a

vain and dying world, become *us*, who have life and immortality brought to light in the gospel : who see God, as prophets and saints of old saw him not, “ God manifest in the flesh :” coming down to men in their own nature, and giving them a perfect pattern of holy obedience, under all the circumstances of life. Further, who see salvation *completed* for sinners : free to “ whosoever believeth :” wrapped up in no obscurity of types, and dark predictions, but so plain, that the simplest cannot mistake in it : and who live, moreover, under the dispensation of the Spirit, of whom it is testified, “ *Every one that asketh* receiveth.”

My beloved brethren, we too little consider these unspeakable privileges which we possess, above holy men of old, in that light of the knowledge of the glory of God, which shines to us, so clearly, in the face of Jesus Christ. Abraham rejoiced to see the day of Christ, at a distance of almost two thousand years : but *we* see it *near* : not *some* of us only,—the greatest (as he was) among the saints of God, but the very *least* in the kingdom of heaven. O may we lay to heart the solemn responsibility which attaches to us, who live in this full splendour of the gospel day ; under the largest revelation of the character, and purposes of God, ever vouchsafed to man ! “ What shall the end be of them,” —the apostle leaves the question, as unable to give any adequate reply to it,—“ What shall the end be of them who *obey not* the gospel of God ?” One thing at least we know, from the lips of him whose judgment is irreversible, and it may well make the ears of every one that heareth it to tingle. “ I say unto you,” said Jesus to a city, whose privileges, however great, are not to be compared with ours, “ it shall be *more tolerable*

for the land of Sodom, in the day of judgment, than for thee!"

2. Be satisfied with no knowledge of God to which you have yet attained. Though, like Paul, you had been caught up into the third heaven; though, like him, you had received what you know of Christ by his own immediate revelation, yet should your prayer be, with Paul, "*That I may know him :*" yet should your language be, as his was, "*Not as though I had already attained.*" Still have you reason to say, "*Now I know in part.*" Nay, beloved, were you even as angels are in heaven, yet is this salvation of Jesus a mystery so deep,—one, every fresh insight into which gives such glorious discoveries of God, that even angels "*desire to look into it.*" (1 Pet. i. 12.) εἰς ἃ ἐπιθυμοῦσιν ἄγγελοι ΠΑΡΑΚΥΨΑΙ—a word which expresses a *bending over* any thing with eager desire to get a thorough insight into it. How does this shame *our* *earthly*, who are *the subjects* of this redemption, and yet presently think we know enough of it; and must needs be *driven*, by trials, and straits, and bitter exercises of mind, into any *growing* acquaintance with God in Christ. Mark how the constant prayer of the apostle, on behalf of all his converts, was for this very thing. "I cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the Spirit of *wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him* : the eyes of your understanding being enlightened," &c. (Eph. i. 16, 17.) "We do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be *filled* with the *knowledge* of his will, in all wisdom and spiritual understanding : that ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing; being fruitful

in every good work, and *increasing in the knowledge of God.*” (Col. i. 9, 10. Comp. Eph. iii. 14—19.)

And the reason of his desire, and prayer, is evident, from the passages themselves. All *holiness* is so connected with this *growing knowledge* of God, that there can be *none without it*. We have already traced all the wickedness of men to the want of it; and so we might trace all good, in the saints of God, to the presence of it. But the passages already referred to must suffice. Yet let me say, as an inducement to seek after this blessed knowledge, that not only all *holiness*, but all *happiness*, all enjoyment of spiritual privileges, hangs upon it. “This is *life eternal*, to *know thee*, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.” Would you have “*grace* and *peace* multiplied unto you?” it must be in the same way; “*through the knowledge* of God, and of Jesus our Lord.” O, beloved, is not this enough to create in you a thirst after *nearer* acquaintance with the blessed God. Can it be, that all these rich blessings have their spring herein, and will you turn away, and be content with what you know already? God forbid. “Acquaint now thyself with him, and be at peace; thereby *good* shall come unto thee.” Plead this gracious promise of the covenant, “All shall know me.” “All thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and *great shall be the peace* of thy children.” Be sure, if you have fled to Jesus, this is your unalienable privilege, and it shall certainly be enjoyed by you, when you hunger and thirst after it. You may be mean in your own eyes,—the *least* of the flock of Christ: but, remember; it is his promise to “the least,” as well as the greatest. Let, then, no unworthiness of your own discourage

you. "Then shall you know, if you *follow on* to know the Lord." The smallest degree of this blessed knowledge attained, will assuredly kindle in you an ardent desire for more. Every step you take in it is a step nearer heaven; a wading deeper into that ocean of bliss, without a bottom or a shore,—God, *your* God, in Christ.

3. Learn to live on God, in the use of ordinances. This is a very different thing from that pernicious conceit of living *above* ordinances. That is the privilege of heaven alone. "There shall be no need of the sun, neither of the moon to lighten it, for the glory of God lightens it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." But, till we arrive at that world of glory, we have no reason to expect any grace, but in the diligent use of means appointed thereto. God can indeed supply the place of means, and, in particular cases, he *does* so : acts independent of them ; to teach us to trust in him, in the dearth of them. But, ordinarily it is otherwise. If the Ethiopian eunuch is to be instructed in the gospel, Philip must be miraculously directed to him, to open to him its glad tidings. If Cornelius is to receive the same blessing, an angel shall instruct him *where to find* a teacher : but not a ray of light does he receive, except through God's appointed ordinance,—the foolishness of *human* preaching, saving them that believe. Look to it, then, brethren, that you undervalue not these outward ministrations ; but look to it, also, that you do not rest in them. As surely as you do, God will dry them up to you, and make you feel what wretched vanities are the best ministrations of man, without his Spirit accompanying them. Learn to live above the creature, in the use of them. Look *through*

all, and *above* all ordinances, to the *God* of ordinances. None teacheth like him ; nay, none teacheth *at all*, to any real edification, or refreshment of the soul, but as the Spirit himself reveals the truth in the hearts of the hearers. “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, *even as the Lord gave to every man?* I have planted, Apollos watered, but *God gave the increase.*” And when you, really, come up to the house of God, to meet *God* there; when you care less *who* ministers, and more *what* is ministered, and how you receive it,—then, assuredly, this increase from God will follow.

“I will abundantly bless her provision, I will satisfy her poor with bread.” The Spirit himself will “take of the things of Christ, and shall show them unto you:” “Your souls shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and your mouth praise him with joyful lips.”

4. This promise of the covenant, like the preceding, has its *complete* fulfilment only in an eternal world. The knowledge of God which the believer *now* has, is real, and delightful; all the things that can be desired are not to be compared unto it. But the sweetest part of its enjoyment is, that it is *an earnest* of what *shall* be. Here he derives it through the medium of defective ordinances, which often, through his carnal reliance on them, disappoint, instead of satisfying him. The “treasure” is in “earthen vessels;” ministered by fallible men, who mix up much of their own infirmities, prejudices, and partialities, along with it: but, above, he shall draw all his knowledge, immediately, from God himself. Here the soul has glimpses of him whose glorious beauty has ravished its affections, and made all beside comparatively insignificant and

worthless; but these are, at best, transient; like the visits of a guest, who comes, and is gone again, and the delight of intercourse is hardly tasted, but it is over. Here the Christian is one while with Jesus, on the mount of transfiguration, saying, Master, it is good for me to be here; anon, he is in the valley of the shadow of death, crying out, like his Lord, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? Here the face of his God wears frowns, as well as smiles. But there it is perpetual sunshine,—perpetual favour. Here the veils of flesh and sense incapacitate him from apprehending God as he is. The eye of faith with difficulty penetrates the gloom. He sees through a glass darkly. He gets some feeble notions, enough to guide him safe through this dark world, and to make him long for more. But when he drops this burden of sinful flesh, when, “absent from the body,” he is “present with the Lord,” then he shall know indeed: he shall see “face to face,” and dwell in the eternal brightness of that blissful vision. His “eyes shall see the King in his beauty,” and he shall confess the perfect fulfilment of this word of promise, “They shall know me.”

O may the Spirit of God, beloved, reveal this blessedness of the saints in light, to our souls! May we realize it, as what shall presently be ours: and, in the prospect of it, be content to labour, and suffer, and wait in hope, “until the day break, and the shadows flee away.”

Then shall I see, and hear, and know,
All that my soul desired below;
And all my powers find sweet employ,
In that eternal world of joy.

PART VII.

MAN WORKING, AND GOD ENABLING.

PHILIPPIANS ii. 12, 13.—*Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling ; for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.*

THESE words address themselves to us with singular appropriateness, and emphasis, in connexion with the subject which we have been considering. We have now completed the view which we proposed to take of that wondrous covenant of grace, confirmed of God, in Christ, to be the resting-place of a sinner—the sure foundation of hope and confidence in his sight. We have seen the exceeding riches of pardoning mercy therein freely provided for guilty men ; the boundless fulness of its promised blessings,—divine renewal, divine relationship, and divine enlightening ;—and further, the absolute, unconditional character of its provisions ; God engaging to accomplish, in the hearts of his covenant people, all on which their enjoyment of the blessings of that covenant depends.

What, then, is the impression, which the contemplation of truths like these should leave on every mind ? Surely, if the good Spirit of God have at all revealed them with power to our souls, our feelings will be those

of mingled delight and awe : joy in this abundance of spiritual blessings, and adoring reverence, in the overwhelming sense of the immensity of God's goodness to creatures so mean and vile. Is this, indeed, his method of dealing with all who come to him through Christ ? Is he thus rich in mercy, thus plenteous in goodness ; and does he engage to work all in me, that himself requires of me ? O then, my soul, gird thyself to this blessed work ! here is encouragement to forsake the ways of sin, and labour for the attainment of salvation, in a manner suited to its infinite importance. It is no longer hopeless. What shall hinder, when God is for me ? Yet, seeing how holy is that God with whom I have to do,—how treacherous is my heart,—how countless the dangers which beset my path, and would quickly swallow me up, except as his Almighty arm is my support and shield ; O let me fear and tremble, lest, being led away by the error of the wicked, I fall from my own steadfastness ; lest, after all, I receive this grace of God in vain. My brethren, these are wise resolves ; these are gracious dispositions. We shall not have considered this precious covenant for naught, if any such have been produced, thereby, in our souls. They are, precisely, those which the apostle has in view, when he exhorts, in the words before us, “ Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.”

This beautiful union of holy fear, and yet holy courage,—of entire dependence upon God, and yet unabated and jealous “ diligence, to make our calling and election sure,” is attainable only, nay, I might say, intelligible only to a spiritual mind. Not that there is

any inexplicable mystery in their connexion. Men are continually acting, in the affairs of this life, in the same way. They clear their ground, sow their crops, go through all the toils of husbandry with unremitted diligence; and, when they can do no more, they watch for the increase, they think of it, they talk of it, with the deepest interest: while, yet, it is undeniable, that they cannot make a single blade of wheat spring up, or bear produce. The sun must shine upon it; the rain must water it; the air must nourish it. *They* can command *none* of these. God must work with them, and for them, from first to last; and it is all of his good pleasure, when he will, and how he will; and, for aught they know, frost or flood, blight or drought, may spoil all their labours in a moment. But do they therefore *desist* from their toil, and say, It is all of God; What *can* I do? or, What *need* I do? Far otherwise. God has connected their labour and his blessing; and men know this; and, therefore, though utterly unable to ensure the least profitable result of their toil, they rise up early, and late take rest, and work, as if success depended absolutely, and only, on their own unassisted efforts. Alas! that men should be so wise for time, so foolish for eternity! Take these very men, and talk to them of labour for their souls, and you shall find them instantly objecting the contradiction, of exhorting them to work out their own salvation, while we admonish them, that, “with men it is impossible,”—that “it is God which must work in them, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure.” If this be so, (say men,) what *can* I do? or, if God will thus do all, what *need* I do? Well may it be replied to such, “Out of thine own mouth will I judge thee, thou wicked servant.”

But so blind are men, by nature, in the things of God, that any corrupt reasoning will pass with them as demonstration, in matters of religion, though refuted, every day they live, by their conduct in the ordinary concerns of life. Thus the duty suggested in the text, and the motive by which it is enforced seem, to them, not only unconnected, but directly *opposed*. Men can readily understand the argument, Work out your own salvation, for otherwise judgment will overtake you : or they willingly listen to the vile suggestion, Concern not yourself about it, for God must do all, and you can do nothing. But the apostle, under the teaching of the Spirit, links man's labour, and God's influences, together : uses that very consideration as the main argument for *striving* after salvation, which a corrupt mind so commonly abuses, to justify the very reverse. Let such men remember, that their reasonings, in this matter, as they are contrary to their own rule of action in the things of this world, so are, also, directly at variance with the wisdom of God in his word. The Scriptures everywhere address men as reasonable and accountable beings, capable of using the powers which God has given, to the benefit of their souls ; while they equally ascribe the *actual application* of man's powers, this way, to the sovereign grace and effectual energy of God's Spirit. They declare that God is righteous, who taketh vengeance on the impenitence of man, and at the same time, that no man can turn himself from that impenitence, and come to Christ, "except the Father draw him." And, however men may argue, and cavil, and be glad to select such declarations, to stumble at, and abuse as discouragements from entering on a life of godliness, there

is a conscience in them, which it is hard to stifle, and which loudly proclaims, for God, that when men do wrong, they do it of themselves: none compels them to it; God does not, and Satan cannot. They are “drawn away of their own lust, and enticed.” On the other hand, the child of God acknowledges, with the most unfeigned conviction of its truth, that there is not so much as *a thought* of good, for which he is not indebted, wholly, to the special grace, and almighty energy, of God’s Holy Spirit. “Not that we are sufficient of ourselves *to think* any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God.”

We praise thee, and would praise thee more;
To thee our all we owe!
The precious Saviour, and the power
That makes him precious too.

Instead, then, brethren, of perverse reasonings against calls to repentance, and efforts after holiness, in the fear of God, as if the doctrine of divine influences rendered them unnecessary, or useless, let us seriously consider the momentous interests which are at stake, and to-day, while it is called to-day, harden not our hearts. Let us bow our minds to the plain and unerring testimony of the word of God, assured that the day is coming, that will put to silence the vain and wicked pretenses of ungodly men, and cover them with everlasting confusion. May we be taught of God to connect these, seemingly discordant truths—of God’s grace, and man’s duty,—as we find them connected, by the apostle, in this passage. May our hope in the one only animate us to more diligent performance of the other; that we be “not slothful, but followers of

them, who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises." To this end, let us consider,

I. The duty to which we are here exhorted.

II. The consideration by which it is enforced.

I. The duty to which we are here exhorted. "Work out your own salvation, with fear and trembling." The object proposed to us, in these words, is one which all must confess to be of paramount interest, "Our own salvation." But, in addressing ourselves to this great work, let us be careful to apprehend, exactly, the sense in which the apostle's words are to be understood; lest, instead of obeying the divine injunction, we be found, through a blind perversion of their meaning, to be building zealously, for eternity, on that very foundation of self-righteousness, from which it is the one object of the whole word of God to withdraw us. It is of vital importance to the welfare of our souls, to know, that the exhortation we are considering has no reference whatever to a sinner's procuring pardon, and peace with God, by any works, as such, which he is to perform, thereunto. And, to prove this, we have no need to refer to other passages of Scripture, innumerable, which explicitly declare all such attempts to be as wicked as they are useless. A single consideration settles the point at once; and that is, that they whom the apostle thus exhorts, *were, already, in a state of acceptance*, with God, through Christ. They were "saints in Christ Jesus." (ver. 1.) The apostle joyed over them "for their fellowship with him in the Gospel." (ver. 5.) God had begun in them, and he was persuaded, would finish in them, his good work. (ver. 6.) They were all partakers of the

same grace with the apostle himself. (ver. 7.) Thus they were, undeniably, in a state of salvation, at the time he wrote ; enjoying “ grace and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Clearly, then, the exhortation gives no countenance at all to their error, who are looking for justification, before God, by a course of goodness of their own. To all such we say, in the words of our Lord, “ *This is the work of God, that ye believe on him whom he hath sent.*” All that *merits* salvation for sinners is *in Christ* ; and faith *accepts* Christ, as God offers him ; and so makes his merit the believer’s own. If there be any worthiness, then, in Christ, any sufficiency in his precious blood-shedding for the removal of sins, any glory in his righteousness, and obedience to the law, for man,—faith, giving the sinner a *personal interest* in all these, brings, *at once*, a full and finished salvation into his soul. This blessing belongs not, indeed, to the *profession* of faith, but it does to the *reality* of faith ; not to the thousands who *say* they believe, while their whole walk gives the lie to their assertion : but to all who *do* believe, and that, simply, *because* they do. The chief of sinners is a justified person, “justified,” eternally, “from all things,” that instant that he brings his sins, in humble confession of them, to God, and *believes* God’s testimony of his Son, that *he* is indeed the Lamb, the sacrifice provided of God, which “*taketh away* the sins of the world.” In this way, the *vilest* may be saved,—freely pardoned, through the tender mercy of our God, who has laid our trespasses upon Jesus. And in this way, only, must *they also* be saved,—who are the *most righteous* and exemplary, in their own eyes. All such right-

eousness must they renounce, as a ground of dependence, in the sight of God. "For there is *no difference* for *all* have sinned, and *come short* of the glory of God. Being justified *freely*, by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."

And, as this is the *first* hope of a sinner, so it is the *only* hope, *to the last*, by which any man, though holy as Paul himself, can draw nigh unto God. In the pilgrimage of life, in the hour of death, in the day of judgment, his only acceptable plea is summed up in this,—Christ my atonement, Christ my righteousness: "The end of the law, for righteousness, to every one that believeth." (See, again, pages 95—104.)

Thus, then, as respects that first blessing which a sinner needs, pardon for his sins, and peace with God, we cannot too earnestly guard men against the notion, that any works of their own can, in the *smallest* degree, contribute to procure it for them. But, have these words *no* application to the case of a poor dark sinner yet destitute of salvation? Is there nothing *he* is to do? no working out his own salvation, to which we should exhort him. Doubtless there is. And the one great work which he is commanded, is, the utter renunciation of every thing which he *has* done, or *can* do, as a ground of hope in the sight of God:—the *hardest* work, to a proud, ignorant sinner, that ever God can propose to him. He must learn that all he can do is mixed with sin: his best righteousness, but "filthy rags." He must repent of *his righteousness*, so called. He must seek for something out of himself, as one who, having once fancied that he was "rich, and increased in goods, and had need of nothing," now finds out, that he is

“wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.” And when he is brought to this, O how sweet will it be to him to hear of Jesus, having plenteous pardons, robes of righteousness, riches of grace, the residue of the Spirit,—all treasured up in him, who “waits to be gracious,”—to enrich with them the soul of a guilty penitent, when once he is made sensible of his need, and comes to him for their bestowal. He will feel that he has indeed a work to do ; but it is, to get emptied of self,—self-love, self-will, self-righteousness,—and to receive Christ, and all that is Christ’s, every day, by faith, into his heart. O happy they, who are thus working out their own salvation ! Let me earnestly exhort all to set about this important work,—“*your own* salvation.” Observe, it is what every man needs for *himself*. A man ought, indeed, to care for the souls of *others* ; but his *first*, his *chief* concern is about *his own* soul. “What *must I* do to be saved? How shall I escape from the wrath to come?” Mark this, brethren, as many of you as are prone to speculate in religion: to ask curious questions relating to the salvation of *others*, while you are not in earnest for your own. “Lord,” said one, “are there *few* that be saved?” So, now, men to whom is brought the blessed news of salvation through the blood of Christ, instead of acting upon the conviction, Here is a *remedy* for the disease under which I am perishing, busy themselves to know what shall become of *others*, to whom the gospel has never been preached, or whose circumstances in life are unfavourable to its reception. Now here, beloved, we bring you a matter of infinitely *nearer* moment,—*your own* salvation. About *this* it becomes you to inquire. For this it is

your highest wisdom to be diligent. The term is one which carries with it an alarm of *danger* to every man. There is evil to which he, *personally*, is exposed. He is in a condition out of which he needs deliverance. In one word, man is a sinner: and, as such, he is destitute of the divine favour, and exposed to intolerable wrath of God in the world to come. But, alas! tell men of their danger, they heed it not. They labour much for the meat that perisheth. They fear and tremble, at the prospect of failure in *that* pursuit: but for the salvation of their souls, they labour not. Here they have no fear. Here they have no desires. Here men sleep away all their precious opportunities. "There is none that *calleth* upon thy name; that *stirreth up himself* to take hold of thee." Men think it enough to hear the *sound* of the gospel. They *talk* about God and his salvation. They perplex themselves, it may be, with those things in it which God has hidden from them; but they *call not* on God; are not in earnest to *come* to him. O but, this, brethren, is what you need: a *stirring up* of yourselves to *take hold* on God: a working out your own salvation, with fear and trembling. "Awake, then, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light." *Bestir* thyself in this great matter. Inquire, *Am I* thus engaged? I *hear* of salvation continually; am I *seeking* it? Am I *striving* after its attainment, in that deep conviction of my danger which belief in God's truth must inspire? God grant none of us may trifle any longer: "And that, knowing the time, that now it is *high time* to awake out of sleep." Let us realize the thought of being summoned, unprepared, into the presence of God, and

to-day, while it is called *to-day*, work out our own salvation, with fear and trembling.

But the exhortation which we are considering is addressed, rather, to the believer in Jesus, who is already in a state of favour and acceptance with God. How, then, it may be asked, can they be called to work out their own salvation, who are already in the enjoyment of it? The answer is easy. Salvation, taken (as it is here) in its *largest* acceptance, is not confined to justification, which is only the beginning and pledge of it; but to that *complete* deliverance from evil, that enjoyment of God, which is continually perfecting in the believer, but of which he has not the *full* experience, (so that there is nothing left him to desire,) till body and soul, together, are delivered from the bondage of corruption, and partake of the Redeemer's glory, in his heavenly kingdom. View justification as it is the sure *harbinger* of this blessedness, as it gives an *unalienable title* thereto, (because it rests on the *finished* work of Christ,) and itself is, not improperly, called salvation; and so those words are to be understood, "Who *hath* saved us, and called us, with an holy calling." But, in any other light, the Christian has, in this world, only the *hope* of salvation; and so it is called, (Col. i. 5,) "The *hope* which is *laid up for you* in heaven," because it is the great object of hope till he arrive there. There it is ministered in its fulness, and hope is lost in blissful possession. But, while he is in this world, the Christian feels that he has not attained. He wants a *meetness* for glory, by the full development of that spiritual life, and maturity of its powers which God has given him in Christ. He has to get deeper insight into his own natural wretched-

ness and ruin ; increasing sense of sin's malignity, firmer hold on his spiritual privileges and blessings ; assurance of understanding, and faith, and hope. He has to *grow* in grace, and in the knowledge of his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ : to pass from a babe to a young man, and from a young man to a father, in Christ. These things cannot be attained without effort. The world, the flesh, and the devil, are confederate against him,—sworn to oppose him to the uttermost. Against these he must take unto him the whole armour of God, (*πανοπλίαν*,) that he may be able to withstand in the evil day ; and, in the experience of conflict, he finds the truth of that declaration, “Happy is the man that *feareth always* :” the value of that admonition, “Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed, lest he fall.” The Christian is as a man who is drawing up a heavy weight, or as one striving against a mighty torrent. Whatever have been his success hitherto, till *all* be done, it is as if *nothing* were done. If he *make* not progress, he is *losing* what he *has* made. (2 John 8.) If he relax his exertions, they are as though he had never made them at all. Let him have what assurance he may, then, of final success, this does but animate him to renewed efforts. The object to be attained is of infinite value : the result of failure is inconceivably terrible : the tendency to it is incessant : the sources of it innumerable. Under such circumstances, he is tremblingly alive to the perils of his present condition. He casts his eyes towards heaven, and he believes, and knows, that it is his home. What he hopes for is “laid up *for him*” there, but there, as yet, he is not ; and, till he be, the ardour of his desire, the experience of evil in him, and

around him, the dreadful possibility of self-deception and final ruin, all prompt him to work out his own salvation, with fear and trembling. Sin (saith he) is *in* me, though now it *reign* not. Corruption is still strong, though grace, blessed be God, is stronger. Satan is as active, as cruel, as mighty, now, as ever he was. There is much remaining darkness in my understanding, much coldness and earthliness of my affections. I continually feel the power of my spiritual enemies, and manifold temptation to depart from God. I see many around me, who once made as fair and consistent a profession as I do: they set out well, heavenward, but they have turned back, it may be, to perdition. I know that my heart is as bad as theirs: and my only safety is to watch and pray, and "give diligence to make my calling and election sure." Let me "not be high-minded, but fear."

Brethren, the man who has persuaded himself, I have believed in Christ, and therefore all is safe, therefore I need be under no apprehensions as to the issue,—such a man is certainly deceiving his own soul. It is true, indeed, the believer in Jesus *is* safe. Never let us give up the precious truth of God, because men abuse it (as they will *all* truth) to their own evil purposes. I say, the believer in Jesus *is* safe, eternally so: but he is so, because his faith is connected with a change of heart, a new principle of holiness within him, which causes him to abhor sin above all things, to desire growing conformity to God, and meetness for glory. His faith begets in him a lively sense of his danger, a realizing apprehension of heaven's joys, and hell's terrors. Hence he works out his own salvation. He gives his best thoughts to this great object, and counts it the one

thing needful. The word rendered "work out," expresses the labour of husbandry, or manual labour, of any kind, for the accomplishment of necessary work. Thus it aptly represents the steady and persevering exercise of the soul for the *complete* attainment of that blessedness, the beginning and earnest of which is already enjoyed. The apostle, in this very epistle, describing his own experience, (chap. iii. 12—14,) draws this character to the life. "Not," saith he, "as though I had already attained, either were already perfect ; but *I follow after*, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended, *but this one thing I do*,—forgetting the things which are behind, and *reaching forth* unto those things which are before, *I press toward the mark*, for the prize of the high calling of God, in Christ Jesus." Now, this man was, evidently, working out his own salvation, with fear and trembling. He was an apostle of eminent attainments. He could say, "I know in whom I have believed." "I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, . . . nor things present, nor things to come . . . shall separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." He knew that he was a child of God, a "partaker of the divine nature:" that he had the life of God in him, spiritual faculties suited to the enjoyment of God; and he rejoiced herein, always. In the conviction that these Philippian converts were partakers with him of the same grace, he does not hesitate, for a moment, to express the same confidence as respected them also. "Being *confident*" (chap. i. 6) "of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you, will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ."

But mark, beloved, how this blessed assurance is in perfect accordance with holy fear and labour. You have the two remarkably connected by this apostle, (2 Cor. v.) “We *know*,” saith he, “that if our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God Now he that hath wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who hath also given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are *always confident*, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord.” Now did this perpetual confidence encourage him (as men say it must) to live in ease and sloth? Nay, verily, it was his *grand stimulus* to exertion. “We are always confident *Wherefore we labour*, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.” This confidence of the believer, then, is perfectly consistent with the exercise of godly jealousy over a treacherous heart, in an insnaring world. The one can only be enjoyed in connexion with the other. “Lest,” (says this same apostle,) “having preached to others, I myself should be *a cast-away*.” Thus, beloved, the true believer, in the fullest enjoyment of all his privileges, “serves the Lord *with fear*, and rejoices *with trembling*.” Such is the language of the holy psalmist; and it marks the exact agreement of the experience of God’s saints in every age. The Spirit which he commends to us is, precisely, that suggested by the apostle, in the passage before us.

And we may note three special reasons for this fear and trembling, in the breasts of God’s covenant people.

1. Their awful sense of the majesty and holiness of that God with whom they have to do. The phrase, “with fear and trembling,” in two other places where

it occurs, expresses this same reverential awe, and submission of the spirits of men to authority. So St. Paul reminds the Corinthians, how, when he had sent Titus to them, "with fear and trembling they had received him." And, again, he exhorts servants to be obedient, in the same spirit, to their earthly masters. Much more, then, will the servant of *Christ* cherish this becoming spirit toward that infinitely glorious Lord. The very love wherewith Christ hath loved him, so vast, so unmerited, the depths of shame and suffering to which he condescended for his redemption, will bring the soul that ever, really, felt this love, into the dust of self-abasement in his sight.

Indeed, this is a *never-failing* accompaniment of *all* spiritual discovery of God, whatever be the particular character of that discovery. Job saw a little of the glory of God, in creation, and the effect of it was instantly to bring him low in conscious vileness. "I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear, but now *mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore, I abhor myself*, and repent in dust and ashes." Isaiah saw a little of this glory of God, when his train filled the temple, and the seraphim cried one to another, saying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." How did the sight affect him? "Then said I, *Wo is me! for I am undone*, for I am a man of unclean lips." Peter saw a little of this same divine glory in Christ, when, after toiling all night, and taking nothing, his net was miraculously filled, even to breaking. "And he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me, *for I am a sinful man, O Lord.*" Thus we see, how all spiritual discovery of the blessed God, even in the way of love and goodness,

fills the soul with an awful sense of its own nothingness and vileness; causes it to fear and tremble at "this glorious and fearful name, The Lord our God."

Now, in the work of his salvation, the believer comes into *immediate contact* with this holy and dreadful God. The reason given by the apostle for engaging in it with fear and trembling,—“For it is God which worketh in you,”—may, therefore, well be understood, in part, as having such a bearing. As though he had said, remember who it is that is immediately dealing with you, and influencing you, in this work of your salvation. It is God himself. Well, then, may a sense of *his* presence, who is holy, and hating iniquity, cause the *sin-infected*, though pardoned sinner, to rejoice with trembling. St. Peter, addressing believers, suggests to them the same holy dread, in the apprehension of the righteous and impartial character of God. “If ye call on the Father, who, without respect of persons, judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.” *Pass it in fear*. Assuredly, brethren, due thoughts of that glorious Being, who is “fearful,” even “in praises,” would solemnize the mind of the most lively, happy Christian, and preserve in him that habitual awe and reverence, which is the proper spirit of a child of God, in his most intimate and endearing intercourse with a Father *who is in heaven*. Our Lord teaches us that this should be the first thought of a creature, in approaching God. “*Hallowed be thy name.*” Such a spirit is in perfect unison with a spirit of adoption; nay, it is the *only* spirit in which any pleasant fellowship with God can be maintained. How well this godly fear agrees with spiritual enjoyment you may see, at once, by what is recorded

of the primitive believers, who, "walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied." (Acts ix. 31.)

While, then, you exult in the grace and love of a covenant God, in liberty to call him Father, and go, with boldness, into his very presence, ever remember, that, where these privileges are ministered by God's Spirit, there invariably accompanies them a profound adoration, a holy awe of that glorious majesty, which keeps the soul in its proper place, and is as widely remote from unhallowed familiarity as it is from slavish fear. "O Lord," saith Daniel, "the *great and dreadful God, keeping covenant and mercy.*" So we are taught to desire the union of *both* these dispositions, in that prayer of our invaluable Liturgy, "That it may please thee to give us an heart to LOVE and DREAD thee, and diligently to live after thy commandments."

2. The very immensity of the grace of God in the gospel, while it fills the soul of a Christian with holy joy and triumph, will also inspire a salutary fear, lest mercy so unspeakable, promises so exceeding great and precious, privileges so unexampled and abundant, should, after all, have been bestowed in vain, and heap only aggravated condemnation on his head. Is it so, (he will say,) that there is an inheritance in light, a rest with God, reserved for the saints above? O then let me *fear*, lest, a promise being left me of entering into his rest, I should even *seem* to come short of it. Have I reason to hope that God the Father has had thoughts of love to me in Christ? Was God the Son incarnate for my salvation? Does God the Spirit condescend to come into this foolish heart, and there plead with me to accept his blessings? How shall I not tremble at

the thought of slighting this immeasurable love, quenching his blessed influences? What holy jealousy becomes me, to *cultivate* this friendship of my God ; to *improve* these privileges ; to *answer* the expectations of him who has transplanted me out of the wilderness of this world ; has brought me into his garden ; grafted me into his Son Jesus Christ ; and now watches over me, and nourishes me with these living waters of grace, that I may bring forth fruit to his praise. Bear with me, O my God and Saviour, that I have, as yet, yielded so few, so miserable returns, for all thy care and kindness ! How immense thy love ! How faint my gratitude ! How gentle thy dealings with me ! How perverse and froward my thoughts and dispositions toward thee ! How often hast thou looked that I should bring forth grapes, and I have brought forth wild grapes ! Glory be to thy grace, (for it is of grace alone,) that thou sparest me, yet a living branch of the living Vine. O let me fear and tremble, lest I weary thee with my ingratitude for thy mercies, my continued barrenness under thy fostering hand ! How shall I escape, if I neglect so great salvation ?

3. A third cause of this fear and trembling is, that sense, in the Christian's mind, which we have already noticed, of the dangers with which he is beset, and the proneness of his own heart to betray him, every moment, to his spiritual enemies. Of these it pleases God, in his love and wisdom, to give the believer a frequent and painful perception. While sinners, in the blindness and hardness of their hearts, are going on at their ease in sin, and saying to themselves, Peace and safety : there shall no harm happen unto us ; the believer is alive to the awfulness of his present condition

I thank God (he will say) for the sweet assurance of preservation which he has been pleased to give me, and on this, confirmed as it is by all my experience hitherto, I do stay my soul, and hope amidst the billows ; but, yet, I feel that it becomes me to rejoice with trembling. I know a little of the depravity of my heart ; but what is the *extent* of its deceitfulness, what it is capable of, if left for a moment to itself, only God can tell. He tells me, indeed, of victory ; but then, even victory supposes *conflict* : and conflict cannot be maintained without perpetual watchfulness and toil. My enemies gather themselves, daily, against my soul ; and many of my brethren, for want of this fear and trembling, have received a wound, and a fall, the effects of which they have carried with them to the end of their days.

Thus the man who has the clearest views of the riches of divine grace, who “draws water, with joy, out of the wells of salvation” opened to him in the gospel, and has the fullest assurance of the faithfulness of a covenant God to give to his sheep eternal life, yet finds abundant reason to *labour*, with holy *fear* and *trembling*, for the attainment of his salvation ; yea, as much, as if he were wholly dependent upon his own exertions to secure it. Deeply sensible of his own grievous imperfections, and tracing them to the feebleness of the divine life within him, he strives after maturity, in the use of all those means of grace by which God has appointed that he shall grow into a perfect man in Christ Jesus. He “adds to his faith virtue,” and all the graces of the Christian character. This is, especially, what the apostle had in view in the exhortation

“Work out your own salvation.” Not the getting merely correct notions of the grace of God ; no, nor even the exercise of devotional feelings towards God and Christ : but, mainly, the attainment of *the mind* that was in Christ,—the putting off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and putting on the new man, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness. It is the pursuit, in fact, of *practical* godliness ; that which purifies the heart, regulates our tempers, habits, and dispositions ; sanctifies, and sweetens, the daily intercourse of life. Such a spirit and demeanour as *adorn* the gospel, and constrain all who witness it to glorify God in us. It is clear, from the context, that this is the drift of the apostle, in the exhortation we are considering. “Only,” saith he, “let your conversation be, as becometh the gospel of Christ.” And he then proceeds to point out the *details* of such a conduct ; exhorting them to unity of spirit as brethren, and in the faith and patience of Jesus Christ : to have a tender regard for the welfare, one of another, according to the mind that was in Christ Jesus: to be *blameless* and *harmless*, the sons of God without rebuke, shining, *as lights*, in an evil world. In a word, brethren, this working out our own salvation is a following out, in our daily walk, of that deliverance from evil, and from all its consequences, which is brought nigh to us in the gospel. After the *completion* of this blessedness the believer pants ; and, until it be attained, he labours for it with godly fear. And the assurance of help and sufficiency for him, in God, is so far from *slackening* his exertions, that it is rather his great *incitement* to them : the only thing

which can at all animate him to persevere in the tremendous conflict in which he is engaged.

Let us then proceed to consider,

II. The argument by which the exhortation is enforced. "For it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure."

The man who has never set himself, in earnest, to seek the salvation of his soul, or who is seeking it in ways of Satan's own devising for his ruin, may find very little difficulty in religion : it is, obviously, the policy of his enemy to give him no disturbance, but to lull him to sleep in the delusion that all is well with him. He goes his round of duties, and flatters himself he is working out a salvation for himself, as the Bible bids him do. He finds no such dreadful reluctance, in his will, to the service which he has set himself : no such impossibility of performing it by his own unassisted strength. He can look with much complacency on many good wishes, and good works, of his past life, and has the feeling, if not the language, of him who said, "God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are." Set before him the consolations of grace, the assurance of preservation to the end, through the mighty power of God, engaged in, and for the believer,—he regards them as direct encouragements to sin ; to cease from labour ; to live (as nothing but necessity, or pride of reputation, restrains him from living) in neglect of God and his will. But with the Christian it is otherwise. He has spiritual views of God: spiritual perception of his perfect law, in all its holiness and goodness. He sees that there is no blessedness, but in having a *likeness* to God; in having his whole body, soul, and spirit,

brought into most entire and willing subjection to that divine commandment. From the moment of this discovery, all self-satisfaction, all truce with spiritual enemies, all fancied ease and security in religion, are gone for ever. Now, the utter corruption of the will, the prostration of all the powers of man's soul, when he would turn them to the performance of that which is good, is made awfully apparent. The man knows it, feels it, groans under it. It is no longer a subject of *dispute* and speculation, or, at best, only part of his *creed*; but it is a matter of daily, hourly *experience*. He finds in himself something which is continually rising up against all that is spiritual in religion; a reluctance to holy exercises; a shrinking from God; a longing after deliverance from his evils, and yet a something that dreads it, and pleads for them within. And if this reluctance be resisted, and overcome,—if he set himself to holy duties, still, his very best actions have some foul alloy of sin. In the motive, or the manner of their performance, they come, altogether, short of what he aimed at in them. Does he set himself to communion with his God? O how frequently has he to mourn over entire failure in this blessed duty! His thoughts wander; his spirits flag: any vanity and impertinence, that would scarce *occur* to him at another time, now distract his mind, that he cannot engage it in real, spiritual converse with God. Thus he finds continual reason to take up that mournful complaint of an apostle, The good that I would, I do not; but the evil that I would not, that I do.

Now this remaining power of sin, felt in the affections and habits of the soul, might well discourage the Christian from working out his own salvation, as some-

thing, the attainment of which, in the face of such opposition, is utterly hopeless, and impossible. How shall he ever get rid of these detested evils, which cleave to him as his very self? Here, saith the Scripture, is your encouragement. "God worketh in you." And this, both to will and to do. Let us consider, a little more distinctly, his operations, in both these particulars.

He worketh in us *to will*. "The condition of man, after the fall of Adam, is such," (saith our tenth Article,) "that he cannot turn, and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, to faith and calling upon God. Wherefore, we have no power to do good works, pleasant and acceptable to God, without the grace of God preventing us, that we may have a good will, and working with us, when we have that good will." God finds the sinner utterly averse from holiness: the whole bias of his mind setting against it: and, let him have what sense he may of ruin in the course he is pursuing, a depraved will leads him on, that he cannot bring himself to forsake it. He may feel, at times, that he *ought* to work out his own salvation; and some ineffectual efforts he may make, for a season, to do so; but it is like trying to turn the needle from its pole. There is no *will* towards God: no *heart* for the performance of any thing but sin. Hence the attempt is presently given over, in weariness and despair. This is the issue of all such endeavours, of unregenerate men, to make themselves good in their own strength, from the mere force of convictions that they *ought* so to do. The mind is enslaved; and, therefore, convince such men (as you may convince them) of the folly, and fatal consequences, of sin,—set

before them eternal judgment in all its terrors, they may fear and tremble, as Felix did, when Paul reasoned with him of such things; but, whatever be the occasional struggle in their minds, they are so infatuated with the *love* of sin, that they will not, cannot break from it. This bondage of the sinner's mind, be it remembered, in no way lessens his responsibility for what he does. God created man perfect: he was free to choose according to the dictates of an unbiassed and pure spirit; and God has never taken away any of these powers, or man's liberty to use them as he will. But man has corrupted himself by sin; which has brought in darkness upon the understanding, perverseness in the will, a depraved bias, that inevitably carries him to the choice, only, of what is sinful. He calls evil good, and good evil; puts darkness for light, and light for darkness; bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter. Thus he is a miserable bond-slave of the devil: not because God has *taken from him* his moral freedom; not that he is at the mercy of the devil, to act evil, *whether he will or no*. Satan (however he work as he will, in the children of disobedience) can do nothing, but by the man's self,—his own consent is necessary to every action of his life. His own depraved will is the chain that binds him: so that his misery, and his sin, are one.

It is clear, then, that, in this condition, he needs far more than the mere *exhibition* of duty. Light is come into the world, but men *shut their eyes* to it, and walk on, still, in darkness. Men need the putting forth of a divine *power* upon their minds, that shall effectually influence them to *choose* that which, naturally, they hate, and enable them to *do* that for which, naturally, they have no power. The salvation of his

people is, therefore, promised to the Saviour, in those most appropriate terms, “Thy people shall be *willing, in the day of thy power.*” He puts forth a mighty *energy* upon their souls, by his Spirit, whereby he causes the dead in sins to live: the man who was, heretofore, blinded, by the love of sin, to see its proper odiousness, in the light of the divine glory and beauty. And this blessed light, brethren, shining in the heart, (2 Cor. iv. 6,) and revealing the truth as it is in Jesus, is more than mere *accurate apprehension* of the things discovered. It is “the light of *life.*” It is a *soul-engaging* light, which disabuses the deceived and perverted affections of the soul, overcomes the depraved bias of the will, and wins the man most sweetly, and rationally, yet withal, invincibly, to choose that God, from whom, before, he was alienated, through the ignorance that was in him. “Jesus saith unto him, Follow me; and he arose and followed him.” Thus, no *force* is put upon the mind, that it is *dragged*, as it were *against its will*, to go after holiness, any more than, before, it was forced, against itself, to sin. The operations of God’s Spirit, however real and effectual, are not, perhaps, in *any* case, distinguishable, by the man himself, from the motions *of his own mind*. They do but *restore* free agency; rescue from the miserable fascinations that enslaved the man, and made him the consenting, though conscious instrument of his own destruction. The truth has made him free, and he is free indeed. When good and evil are presented to the mind, he is enabled to apprehend the proper character of each; and is won to hate the evil, and choose the good.

But, alas! so fallen and ruined is man, that, even

when the eyes of his mind *are* thus enlightened, and the warp upon his judgment and affections removed, by God's Spirit, his enfeebled powers are utterly inadequate to the performance of that on which his renewed heart is set. Blessed be God, however, not only is there *cleansing* for him, and sense of *acceptance*, through the blood of Jesus, under this distressing experience, but there is *help* for him in his God. He knows the full measure of his people's wretchedness : the dreadful impossibilities that lie in the way, even when his almighty grace has *disposed* them to delight in him, and his ways. Without him they can do nothing. But, having created the desire after holiness, he brings it to a blessed effect. He forsakes not his own work.

He worketh in us *to do*. Here, again, he deals with men as *reasonable* beings. He does not work any effect by them, as we may produce it, by operating on mere machinery, that is entirely passive under our hand. Passive, indeed, man is, *altogether*, as to any *self-originated* motion of his heart towards God. It is not in him, until the day when God creates it there, by his own power. "There is *none* that *seeketh* after God." In the first instance, then, man is a *mere recipient* of grace, sovereignly bestowed "of God's good pleasure." But the grace, so bestowed, works in the man by his own powers, and with his own consent. They in whom God works to will, and to do, are engaged, by that influence, (insensible to them, except in its effects,) to work out their own salvation.

That seems a strange word of Christ, to the man who had a withered hand, Stretch out thy hand for cure. The act *argued a cure* already received. So

men reason now. We bid them seek God, and they object, they cannot : that the act implies a will already given ; which gift they must therefore wait for. We bid them do. They reply, God must, first, work in them to do. Nay, but, O man, stretch forth thy hand. The paralytic might have reasoned like you ; but he obeyed ; and, in his own impotent attempt, the omnipotence of him who bade him wrought the act he aimed at. So it is now. God works all, in his working people. While others cavil, they obey ; and they get on, and bring forth fruit to life eternal. “ He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have *no might* he *increaseth* strength : ” and “ they that wait upon the Lord ” find it so. “ They shall mount up with wings, as eagles ; they shall run, and not be weary ; and they shall walk, and not faint. ” *I can do all things*, (saith one of them,) through Christ, which strengtheneth me.

From this subject we may draw a lesson of humiliation, and a lesson of encouragement.

1. A lesson of *humiliation*. How total is man’s ruin ! He cannot *prepare* himself, has no *inclination* towards any thing that is spiritually good. Let man alone, and the whole tendency of his nature is to get away, *more and more*, from God, as all the history of Adam’s family demonstrates. “ The imagination of his heart is evil from his youth. ” Any spiritual revelation of God is speedily lost by man, and the grossest abominations, gradually, take its place. But look at men even in the full light of the gospel day. They may be well instructed in its principles. They may have pious relations, a spiritual ministry, bright examples of devotedness to God ever before their view, and, yet, them-

selves be as senseless, as much without any spiritual feeling, or desire after God in Christ, as the *very stones* under their feet. The most to which men attain by nature, under such circumstances, is an improved morality, and correcter notions of the character of God.

But suppose even the wish created :—God has wrought in them to will. They are renewed in the spirit of their minds. Alas! they *cannot* serve him. “I know,” (saith an apostle,) “that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth *no good thing*. For *to will* is *present* with me : but, how *to perform* that which is good, *I find not*.” This, observe, is the testimony of one who could say, “*I delight* in the law of God, after the inward man,”—a regenerate person,—for, “the carnal mind . . . is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.” Yet, even he, such was the prostration of his powers, through the innate corruption of them by sin, could not use them, as he fain would, in the service of his God! “O wretched man that I am!” saith he, “who shall deliver me from the body of this death?” God grant, this may be our cry, under the same miserable bondage. For we may gather from this subject, secondly,

2. A lesson of *encouragement*. Do you find in you, brethren, as find you will, if at all acquainted with yourselves, a natural *disinclination* of your soul to God and spiritual things? When you would work out your own salvation, does a will, renewed but in part, plead, with terrible force, for the sparing of some beloved lust ! Blessed be God, yet there is hope. If you be at all concerned for your souls, go at once to God, and tell him all the truth. Think not to over-

come the corruption of your will by your own efforts. Tell him of perverse affections, of depraved appetites, of enmity against himself. Hide nothing from him. *He* will create all things new. *He* worketh in us to will: and as to will, so also to do. Wait then on him, and you shall *renew* your strength. This is his method of working in us. Whatever he would have us do, that *he himself* will do in us, when, in a sense of our own insufficiency, we call in his aid, and seek that *his* strength may be perfected in our weakness. When, then, beloved brethren, this work of your salvation is heavy upon your hands, and this will often be, O remember there is help for you in God, and call it in. Fight the battle on your knees, in prayer to God; and, in this posture, he will so work in you, both to will and to do, of his good pleasure, that no enemies, no corruptions, shall prevail against you. In the confidence of this truth, you will live, always, upon him, to fulfil it in your experience; and in the expectation hereof, because "he is faithful who hath promised," you will be cheerful, diligent, laborious. Faith in his help, and love to his name, will make the hardest duty easy, the most self-denying duty pleasant. You will be "steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as you know that your labour is *not in vain* in the Lord."

But, we may rest this encouragement, to the believer, to work out his own salvation, on yet *higher* ground. Consider, not only this truth, of God working in you, but see, further, the *reason* which the apostle assigns for his so doing. He does it, "*of his own good pleasure.*" These words suggest the *delight* which God has in the exercise of his *sovereignty*, for the accomplishment

of this salvation in his people. Has God wrought in you this blessed disposition to his service, and given you, hitherto, some little ability for its fulfilment? Ever remember to what you are indebted for so vast a benefit. "Grace, grace unto it." It is "*of his good pleasure.*" "Ye have not chosen me, saith Christ to his disciples, but I have chosen you, and ordained you that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain." This will be the grateful confession of every soul that is found among their number. Love, without any cause but in itself, found them in the depths of self-chosen ruin. Love looked upon them, and bid them live; subdued their reluctance, and, with sweet constraint, led them to choose him, and give themselves up to the willing service of him from whom they had been estranged. All was "*of his good pleasure.*" This alone is the cause of any difference between them and others; the multitudes, on every side, who, with the same revelation in their hands, heed it not; with the same offer of spiritual blessings in Christ, have no wish for them; no heart, nor energy, for working out their own salvation. This is a consideration that, above all others, gives the soul of the believer a deeply affecting, an inexpressible sense of the mercy which he enjoys. Whence this amazing grace to me? Why am I taken, while others like me, less vile than I was, are left?

Why was I made to hear his voice,

And enter while there's room?

While thousands make a wretched choice,

And rather starve than come.

'Twas the same love which spread the feast,

That kindly forced me in;

Else I had still refused to taste,

And perished in my sin.

And he who first wrought this will in the soul, of his good pleasure, *carries on* his grace, in the same sovereignty of love and power. He sweetly refreshes the soul that is faint and weary, revives its languid graces, enlarges its views, and confirms its hold of divine truth; he calls into exercise the spiritual powers with which he has endowed his people, and sustains them, therein, to the bringing glory to his name, and a rich treasure, to them, of present enjoyment, and future recompense. Hence, the apostle, desiring the complete salvation of his brethren, prays for it under this special view, (and a most cheering view it is,) as the Lord's accomplishment of *his own good pleasure* in their hearts. "Wherefore, also, we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, *and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness*, and the work of faith with power."

Blessed be his glorious name, for such a view of that great work that needs to be perfected in our souls! It is the Lord's own work; his own good pleasure. His delight is, thus to exercise his sovereignty, in goodness, towards wretched sinners. He began, he carries on his salvation, "not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy." The sacrifice of the well-beloved of his soul shows how his heart is set upon it. The exaltation of Jesus to his mediatorial throne, as "Head over all things for the church," has no other object than the accomplishment of it. "*The pleasure of the Lord* shall prosper in his hand." This is the reason, Christian brethren, if you and I are, at this moment, in the enjoyment of one spiritual blessing: if we have any disposition towards God, or ability to perform one act

of service, acceptable to him ;—even the good hand of our God upon us, who “changes not, therefore we are not consumed ;” and who says to us, by “the Amen, the faithful and true witness,” “Fear not, little flock, it is your father’s *good pleasure* to give you the kingdom.” Learn *thus* to contemplate the sovereignty of God, as it is his *delight* to exert it for his people. Find *in it*, and not in yourselves, an all-prevailing argument for grace to help in every time of need. Lord, for *thine own* sake, for thy good pleasure in goodness, perfect that which concerneth me. By this you stand : and in the faith of it, O let your joy and gratitude to a God unsearchable in goodness, abound always. “O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever. *Let the redeemed of the Lord say so*, whom he hath redeemed from the hand of the enemy.”

And now, beloved, how may I better dismiss the whole subject, than by commending both writer and reader to this good pleasure of a covenant God in Christ Jesus ? May it please him to bless this humble exhibition of the riches of his grace in the gospel, to the help and profit of his people ! May he condescend to enlarge, hereby, their understanding of his covenant, and establish their faith in all its free, full, sure, and everlasting blessings ! May he refresh our souls with the plentiful supplies of its grace in time; and bring us, together, to that world, where grace is exchanged for glory, faith for sight, prayers for praises, hope, and desire, and labour, for full salvation, satisfying blessedness, uninterrupted rest !

AMEN !

**This book is under no circumstances to be
taken from the Building**

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